



Enjoying a pizza and a beer on an overnight trip to the mining town of Selebi-Phikwe!

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the January 2013 Newsletter!

The year has begun in full swing, promising to be action packed! Our first group of volunteers arrived early this month, with staff refreshed after the festive break and ready to throw themselves into the year ahead. Volunteer numbers now continue to grow, bringing a wealth of background, experience and enthusiasm to the project.

Finally, we have spotted our first impala youngsters of the season. Better late than never! The harsh drought of last year has meant that many impala have lost or aborted their young, so we are glad that some have managed to give birth. We have also seen young of all the old favourites; wildebeest, zebra, elephant, kudu, eland and more!

So far, this year has been very wet; the last week has gifted us with constant showers and storms and over one day we had 200mm of rain. That is more than the reserve received over the whole of last summer! It makes us hopeful that this year will be much less dry than the last. The river in front of Koro camp is unrecognisable. Rains have poured across South Africa and Botswana and the Limpopo has come cascading down in its run to the coast, flooding the banks and bringing the crocodiles into the drainage lines, ever closer to camp. In times of heavy rain, the volunteers have become very involved in knitting and making blankets for the Mathathane village winter. The knitted squares are coming along nicely!

In this month's edition we hear from Fiona and Yusuke about their experiences at camp on pages 3 and 5. There is an update of the project over the last month on page 6, written by Project Manager David Hancock, and plenty of photos to share on page 8!

Enjoy your read!

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New-found Skills in Birding

Fiona Straton, 36 years old, Australia, 6 week stay

After our first ever sleepout at Mamatumi, we returned to camp just after dawn to discuss our nocturnal sightings and enjoy some breakfast. With a few hours of leisure time before our next activity, we all stumbled to bed for some sleep. At 9am, we reconvened in the *boma* for Dave's Introduction to Bird Identification Workshop. The session was really interesting and we learned the key components to bird identification: distribution, behaviour and general impression, physical attributes, movement and finally sound. Surprisingly, distribution (geographical and habitat type, whether woodland, savannah, forest etc.) was the single most important factor in identifying birds.

Following the course, we tested out our new skills by trying to identify some of the birds we had photographed already, as well as those we could see around the camp. All the education, combined with minimal sleep last night, meant we were hungry (and tired) again! An early lunch of creamy pasta salad ensured we were off for our siestas with a full belly.



3pm saw us all reconvene in the *boma* for our afternoon activities: crocodile census for Sam and Helga and camera traps for Sofie and myself. Monica's leg was still not recovering, so Tess had taken her to the doctor in South Africa. Jumping in the car with Dave, Sofie and I took it in turns to use the GPS to locate the seven camera traps. Once we found a camera, we untied it from the tree and removed the memory card so that the images could be downloaded to the laptop for viewing at camp. We reset each camera and then moved on to the next one.

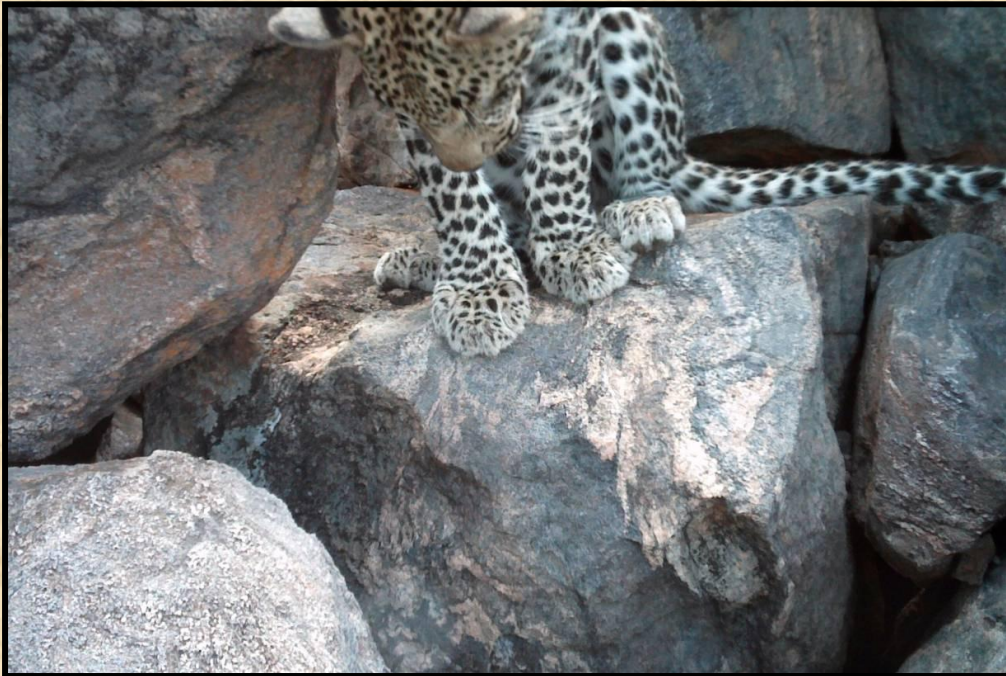
On our return to camp, we sat with Dave to review the images from the camera traps – zebra, elephants and because they are so



sensitive, even butterflies! The cameras also recorded date, time and temperature, with one of them recording 48 degrees in the heat of the day!!

After dinner, Sofie and I tried our hand at bread-making. We made a plain and a fruit loaf and set it to bake over the camp fire. Meanwhile, we settled in to watch the Lion King, all the while with elephants rumbling and trumpeting somewhere close by.

All in all, an amazing 24 hours... this is Africa!!!



Rainy Day Adventures

Yusuke Toyohara, 23 years old, Japan, 2 week stay

Unfortunately, we had heavy rain in the morning, so it was knitting day. We are knitting squares to make blankets for the people in the village over the colder winter. While we were knitting, we watched two documentaries, one on lion and hyena and the other about crocodiles.

After lunch, the weather was getting better. Half of us went to do bird census with Tess and the other group, including myself, went to do baobab census with Dave. During this census, we checked 5 baobabs out of the 90 baobabs there are on the reserve. We estimated their height, extent of damage and animals which live there. Some of them had a lot of damage, mostly because of the elephants. Especially the last baobab we checked, which had actually been pushed over by the elephants. According to Dave, it had fallen down about 2 to 3 months ago. It's a very sad story. It's caused by a high concentration of elephants. There are borders and fences between countries so elephants have to settle in a smaller area. This problem is very difficult to resolve. Governments want to control immigration; however, there shouldn't be borders for animals. We have to consider and resolve this problem in the near future.



Anyway, it was the first time for me to touch baobabs and it was so impressive for me. I would like to have a lot of experience here and enjoy my short stay!

Wild at Tuli Project Update

Vegetation Census

The vegetation census is continuing to provide interesting results, including the recording of new tree species at Wild at Tuli. The data at present shows that Mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*) makes up 52% of the woody vegetation found in the broad-leaved woodland on the property, with Raisin bush (*Grewia spp.*) (21%) and Purple-Pod Terminalia (*Terminalia prunoides*) (15%) making up the majority of the rest of the vegetation in these areas. At least 10 other species of tree have also been recorded in the broad-leaved woodland and undoubtedly also play an important role in the fitness of the ecosystem. Likewise, in the areas of riverine vegetation, 66% of the vegetation recorded so far has been Feverberry (*Croton spp.*). Despite the huge proportion of Feverberry in this system we have recorded a greater diversity in the riverine areas, with a total of 20 identified tree species recorded on vegetation censuses.

Baobab Census/Repair

The continuation of the baobab census has led us to discover at least another 3 baobabs which have been severely damaged by elephants over the winter months. Hopefully now, as the rains have arrived, the elephants will focus their attentions elsewhere and give us a chance to



protect these millennia old trees for future generations of elephants to utilise. These trees have been protected by cutting and placing poles of mopane into the damaged areas to act as support and then wrapping the trees with recycled wire to deter the elephants from ripping the supports out and causing further damage.

Road Clearing

An important and constant task required at Wild at Tuli is road clearing. After the recent rains which saw over 200mm fall in less than 24 hours, more than doubling the amount of rain so far this summer, there have been plenty of roads which need to be cleared to ensure access to various parts of the property to allow us to work effectively. Large amounts of debris have been washed down the usually dry riverbeds and onto the roads. As well as removing debris,

some of the roads have been badly eroded by the flowing water and so are in need of repairing.

Waterhole Digging

The volunteers have played an important role in ensuring the animals at Wild at Tuli have access to drinking water.

When the rains wash down the river beds and across the flat, hard ground of the veld, they pick up large amounts of sand and mud and then drop them along the way. Often this sand and mud is dropped into the holes which have been dug by elephants to get to fresh water running beneath the surface of dry riverbeds. The volunteers have helped by re-digging these holes so that the smaller animals have access to water and are not reliant on the elephants opening these water sources for them.

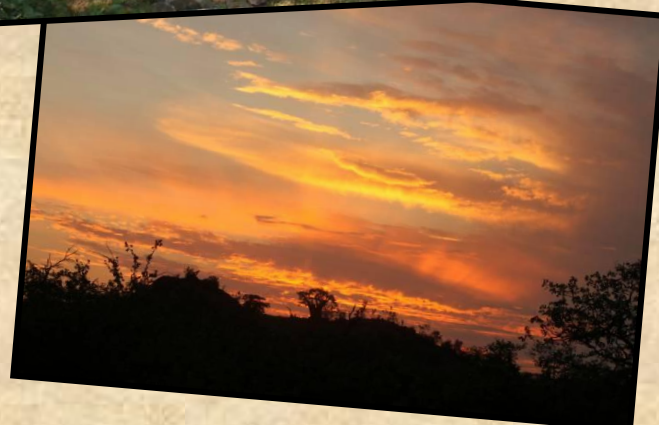


Bush Memories



Clockwise from top left: Santa and his reindeer haul sand to the donga; dancing for the camera trap gods in the hope of amazing pictures; making insect traps; look but don't touch the blister beetle; a herd of elephants enjoy the summer grass; mud wallowing for pula, enjoying an evening meal at the hide, surrounded by glowworms and stars.





Clockwise from top left: team effort at removing old wire fencing; Angus and Harriet release a tiny terrapin to freedom; investigating a moving bush; collecting stones to repair a donga; one never tires of a magnificent African sunset; miniature wildebeest; splash of new paint on the primary school walls; a monitor basks in the sun.