



And then there were few! March volunteers enjoy the luxury of a weekend away in South Africa

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the March 2013 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

What a beautiful time of year for the reserve. The sweltering heat of summer has been offset by bouts of cooler weather as we head onward into the autumn months ahead. This has been wonderfully complimented by several storms, bringing small amounts of rain which send the river flowing briefly once more, a ghost of its former raging glory in the floods of summer. The thunderstorms also provide a welcome change from the waves of heat and of course an excuse for magical African sunset pictures!

The reserve itself still proudly shows off its flowers and greenery. After observing the remarkable and often comical display rituals of the myriad of bird species on the reserve, it is a pleasure to see the fruits of their efforts, as juvenile birds are fledging and can be seen foraging at the close watch of parents and family. Most amusing is to watch the poor victims of brood parasitism endeavour to feed their, often larger, murderous and unknowingly adopted chicks. Many of the antelope continue to present newly born young, emphasising again the late birthing season brought on by the severe drought of last year. With greater rainfall over the summer, we can only hope that this year shall be less harsh on the ecosystem and all its benefactors.

Sadly this month, we bid farewell to one of our guiding staff, Alistair Wilmot, who has provided the project and volunteers with an abundance of enthusiasm, excitement, stories, laughs and knowledge, especially of squirrels, throughout his employment here at Wild at Tuli. He moves on to the next adventure! In his stead, we welcome Abraham, who has joined the team. With an extensive background in guiding and living in the Botswana bush, we look forward to learning all he has to share!

In this month's edition we hear from Anisha and Samuelle about their experiences at camp on pages 3 and 5. There is an update on 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 our month of adventures!

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A Birding Day at the Dam

Anisha Humphreys, 20 years old, Australia, 1 week stay

This morning, my group left camp at 7am and headed to the Thune dam to conduct a bird census. After about an hour and a half drive, we arrived at the dam, a vast expanse of water stretched out in front of us, fringed by greenery. It reminded me of the mangroves back home in Australia. The dam was a recent government initiative to introduce a permanent water source to the area. We were collecting data, not only for our own records, but also for the records of Bird Life Botswana. We are going to continue monitoring how long it takes for birds to move into the new water source, what species and how many.



Led by Dave, Anne, Suzanne, Natsumi, Sofie, Sam and I armed ourselves with binoculars, clipboards and bird books and set out. After a short walk, we settled onto the bank of the dam in the shade to start recording. Within minutes, the group had identified several different species of bird, with the help of Dave. As this was my first bird census, I had no idea what was what, but I was happy to sit, watch and learn and I can now identify a few different types of birds!

After about an hour, we decided to walk to the other side of the dam. We spotted several more birds as well as lots of butterflies and a water monitor splashing around! Our path was hindered by numerous insects and we eventually had to turn back to the car. Exhausted, we sat down and enjoyed a packed picnic lunch at the edge of the dam.

We then decided to drive around the dam. This turned into a bit of an adventure as Dave had never been here before. We ended up on a road which led straight into the dam. 100m away, on the other side of the water, we could see the road emerge. As we were debating whether or not to drive across, a donkey cart pulled up alongside us. They offered to drive Dave across so he could see the depth. So



off they went, Dave, 5 local men and 3 donkeys. It was quite a funny sight! Unfortunately, the water turned out to be too high, so we decided to call it a day and head back to camp. In the end we had recorded over 15 different species of bird!

Back at camp, we all enjoyed washing away the sweat and dirt accumulated over the hours of walking. The afternoon was spent relaxing and packing for the sleep out. At 6pm we left camp and drove to one of the hides on the reserve, Elephant Springs, for dinner. The viewing platform overlooked an almost dry drainage line which ran through a small valley. We all sat on the edge and enjoyed dinner whilst watching the sunset and keeping an eye and ear out for animals.

At 9pm we drove to another hide where we would spend the night. The observation area was on stilts, overlooking a large area of the reserve and a water hole. We organised our mattresses and rolled out our sleeping bags. Tess pointed out some constellations that were visible in the night sky, and showed us how to find south using the Southern Cross or north using Orion's Belt. We then organised the night shifts. Lena and I chose 4-6am so we could watch the sunrise.

I fell asleep under the night sky, the moon almost full, dreaming of impala, the ever present antelope.

The Recipe for a Great Day

Samuelle Brellier, 30 years old, France, 2 month stay

Ingredients:

- Kwa Tuli Reserve
- Volunteers from different countries (Austria, Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland and sometimes more...)
- Staff members (wish Tess and Dave a goodtime during their break from running the camp)
- Activities

Say goodbye to Sofie, Suzanne and Anisha, who are leaving.

At 7am, make up two groups from the remaining volunteers. One group (Amelie, Anne, Brian, Jasmin, and Matt) go with Ras to do alien plant removal (a lovely, itchy activity) and the other group (Anne, Chloe, Lena, Natsumi, and myself) go with Sakaeo to do a bird census along the river (a fascinating activity, my favourite!)



After a few hours' work, return to Koro camp. Until 3:30pm, take a break; have lunch, have a nap, play cards, read, knit, or do nothing.

At 3:30pm, make up two different groups for the next activities; crocodile census and vegetation census.

At the end of a day, after a shower (not optional!) mix up the volunteers at the dinner table to eat Jane's great dinner.



After dinner, go to bed early or play games, chat or spend your own time before going to bed.

Variations: Sometimes add new animals!

Have a good day!

Wild at Tuli Project Update

Thune Dam Bird Census

We recently participated in a national survey conducted twice a year by Birdlife Botswana to monitor population fluctuations in migratory and resident bird species. Upon submitting our results we discovered that there is nobody else in South-Eastern Botswana studying or monitoring birds. We have since been asked to monitor the succession and colonisation of the recently filled Thune Dam by Wetlands International. This study aims to record which water bird species occur at the dam, how many individuals of each species there are, how long it takes each species to start using the dam. So far we have recorded 16 species of water bird and well over 100 individuals, including various wading birds, geese, storks, a fish eagle and even a pair of flamingos, despite the fact the dam has only had water in it for 2 months.



Tree Identification Course

A recent addition to the educational based aspects of the project is the start of a tree identification course. The course covers the basics for learning how to



identify tree species using various physiological features, focusing on the structure and arrangement of the leaves. The course is aimed to work alongside the vegetation census so that volunteers are able to easily recognise or identify the species of tree which they encounter on the census.

Painting Mathathane Primary School

An on-going project we started last July has been painting the interior of the classrooms of the primary school in the local village, Mathathane. The school has 22 classrooms and so far we have painted nearly half of them. We are only able to paint the rooms at the weekends when the children are not in classes so it is a slow process. The condition of the rooms is not spectacular, with dirty and pitted walls which require a good amount of sandpapering and crack filler before we apply the layers of paint.



Bush Memories



Clockwise from top left: uprooting a fallen Appleleaf to plant in Motswiri camp; enjoying a mesmerising sunset; the reserve flourishes from this viewpoint atop a kopje; adventure walking; a rock fig embraces its kopje support; collecting rocks for donga repair and getting excited about it; seldom seen on the reserve, a bull giraffe browses on Apple.



Clockwise from top left: being watched by a herd of zebra; constructing flower presses to display the variety of species which occur on the reserve; knitting blankets for the village; splendid golden insect eggs; an adventurous afternoon at the gorge, dodging crocodile farm escapees; relaxing at Mathathane bar; a tree squirrel munches on lunch; hippopotamus tracks spotted by the camp.

