



Farewell Koro camp, it has been a great pleasure!

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the April 2013 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

April has seen the elephant inhabitants of the reserve return, after their summer disappearance, in magnificent force. This has made our activity around the reserve all the more interesting as elephant seem to have an uncanny ability, despite their size, to camouflage behind even the smallest mopane leaf! The pathetic trumpeting display they make when startled is quite a sound to hear!

We have been very fortunate this summer with the amount of rain we have received, almost 4 times that of last year! The trees have maintained their greenery well into Autumn, grassland areas continue to flourish, waterholes remain stocked and the wildlife are plump and well-fed, better prepared to ensure their survival over the winter months ahead.

After months of anticipation, we have finally made the move to Motswiri, the new camp site! Series of volunteers have contributed to various aspects of its design and operation. We thank you for your time, it has definitely paid off. Motswiri camp looks beautiful! Spoor investigation and observation on sleep outs tell us that Motswiri is ever frequented by curious leopards, mischievous hyena, assertive elephant and a colourful variety of nocturnal critters, as well as all the diurnal favourites. It should make a very interesting new home!

In this month's edition we hear from Julie and Amelie 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 Warm Welcome to Life in the Bush

Julie Thomsen, 21 years old, 2 weeks stay, Denmark

I came Sunday evening to this beautiful area and got a little tour around the camp. It's already dark at 730pm, so I had to remember my flashlight, since there is no electricity here. Most of the volunteers went to bed around 8pm. I thought this was very early and couldn't fall asleep until 11pm. It's also difficult to sleep with all the animal noises which I am not used to hearing.

Next morning, I woke up at 6am and had the project induction. This was an introduction to the camp, the rules and regulations, the safety and surroundings and to the project. It was very clearly explained by Dave, one of the staff, who afterward took me for an introductory drive around the reserve, to see the most common wildlife. I was able to take a lot of pictures of impalas, kudu, birds and learn about each species. We also saw some elephant tracks, but no elephants yet. The other volunteers told me I would surely see them soon!

In the afternoon, at 3pm, we did donga repair with Tess and Abraham, two of the staff members, along with Chloe and Matthias (volunteers). It was pretty hard work but it was interesting to learn what use there is in doing that. In case of heavy rain, the ground won't be further eroded from the drainage line into the banks. We worked until 6pm and I took a nice shower, which are always the best after work! We then had a lovely dinner. I better understand why the volunteers go to bed early because I felt very tired myself.



I had a good night's sleep and woke up at 530am for a bright, new, sunny day! In the middle of this beautiful and enchanting environment! I just love the climate!



At 630am, Dave, AB, Lena, Anne and me took the car to go to 3 sights to do bird census. We were sitting right on the banks of the Limpopo River and it was amazing! I saw some interesting birds that I was able to identify thanks to Dave, AB and a bird book.

We went back to the camp and still had time before lunch, so AB, Lena and I walked to a nearby kopje (Signal Hill) where there was good phone signal to be able to send some text messages to our families. We also enjoyed the fantastic view over the African land! Breathtaking! We decided we would have to come back here to watch the sunset. That I am looking forward to seeing!



This afternoon, at 3pm, Dave, AB, Chloe, Marco and I are going to check the camera traps that are being set up around the reserve. Those cameras capture pictures of the wildlife which walk by. It will be interesting to see which animals are on the pictures!

I'm going to enjoy every day, all day while I am here because the people here are so nice, the activities are really interesting and the landscape is amazing!

Thank you Koro Camp!

Erosion and Elephants

Amelie Rolland, 23 years old, France, 2 month stay

Today, Chloe, Giorgia and Tess left at 7am. They went to Bobonong for the camp shopping, and Chloe needed new shoes!

The rest of us were separated into 2 groups. Anne, Julie and Marco started at 5am and went to Thune Dam for a bird census with Dave. They arrived back at the camp for lunch after a very lovely morning.

Matt, Aurore and I did erosion control with Sakaeo. We went to the drainage line behind Koro camp and started to build small walls* made from Mopane branches woven between wooden Mopane stakes. When we had finished the morning's work, we headed to the kitchen and Jane had made a cake! We offered to try a piece and it was delicious!



In the afternoon, we were split into 2 different groups. Julie and Marco did a crocodile census with AB. Aurore, Matt, Anne and I did an elephant identification drive with Dave. We drove in different parts of the reserve and saw a lot of elephants, including a group of 22 with 3 juveniles. Very impressive! We saw another herd at Elephant Springs and another herd of 8. Lots of new elephants to add the database!

We waved to the baboons as we drove back to camp to a hearty dinner and a relatively early night!

* Editor's Note: We build these walls at the head of the erosion lines, to catch any sediment that is washed through during rainfall, preventing it from running off the soil and further eroding the surface layer

Wild at Tuli Project Update

Koro to Motswiri Camp Move

The long awaited move to the new camp, Motswiri, has happened at last. The finishing touches were applied and the major utilities installed and ready to go. The move itself took a couple of days as everything from teaspoons and field guides to the tents and volunteer luggage had to be moved and reinstalled in their new positions. Every one of the volunteers and staff should be thanked for their enthusiasm and help, facilitating a seamless transition. Thanks is also due to every past volunteer and all the staff who have contributed in some way to the design and construction of different aspects of Motswiri, to make it the home it has become for the project.

The first night in camp was most adventurous, with an unbeatable star studded sky, hyena lurking by the tents, lion roaring constantly throughout the night and a leopard taking a morning stroll by the boma. We look forward to continuing and developing the project from this amazing location.



Elephant Identification

The elephants have been absent from Wild at Tuli for recent weeks but at the beginning of this month they made a triumphant return, appearing overnight in very large numbers. This has allowed us to continue our elephant



identification project which we are using to gain a better understanding of the population size of the elephants in the area and also the composition of the herds. This information can then be used to help monitor the elephant population and their movements. This would allow us to implement management plans to minimise the impact the elephants have on certain areas where they congregate due to the presence of water.

Waterhole Management

We have recently expanded some existing waterholes on one of the drainage lines at Wild at Tuli. The heavy rains earlier in the year raised the water table so there are several small streams which are continuing to flow late into the year. In expanding these pools, we aim to hold water above the surface of the ground for longer into the winter season, providing water for the animals when previously the water would have evaporated away long before.

This month, the volunteers started and completed the initial construction of a new waterhole. All that is needed is a concrete base to hold the water. This waterhole is just within eyesight of Motswiri. The plan is to finish a bridge and viewing area, already under construction, which overlook the waterhole. This will be a beautiful place for volunteers to experience the wildlife up close, as well as to draw wildlife away from the camp in their search of water and to provide a constant water source throughout the year.



Camera Traps

After 2 months of checking and repositioning our camera traps at the gorge we finally attained images of our target species, Cape Clawless Otter. The images show at least 4 otters in a family group which is great news because they are very rarely seen; our images were taken at about 4am which shows their nocturnal habits. We also had a surprise visitor to one of the cameras in the form of a Honey Badger. These 2 newly recorded species brings our database of camera trap images to show 26 different mammal species.



Bush Memories



Clockwise from top left: *Flap-necked Chameleon* stealthily crossing the road; sunset from the *Baobab* platform; building garden beds at *Motswiri* Camp; *Honey Badger* caught on camera trap; spoor identification; deadly *Puff Adders* slides by *Koro*; mud battles on the last day at *Koro*.





Clockwise from top left: Prime position from the boma at Motswiri Camp; picnic day at the gorge on the Limpopo River; Burchell's Zebra; Letsibogo Dam in Selebi-Phikwe on a weekend away; Baobab tree pushed over by elephants; male Waterbuck stares down the game viewer; venomous Black Button Spider dwelling at Motswiri Camp.

