



The final team of volunteers for 2013. What a fantastic year for the conservation project in Botswana!

What's Inside

Editor's Note	2
Volunteer Story – Svenja Willmes	3
Volunteer Story – Simon Schouten	4
Wild at Tuli Project Update	6
Bush Memories	8

Editor's Note

Welcome to the December 2013 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

What a fantastic wrap up to the year! The reserve is blanketed in a myriad of hues of green, the flowers are blooming alongside every rock and tree, every waterhole, every roadway, the wildlife are frolicking with new life and newfound energy at the abundance of food and water, and we have finally seen our first impala babies of the summer season. Absolutely adorable!

Volunteer numbers remained strong right up until the close of the project for Christmas. A huge amount of focus has been given to anti-poaching walks and drives, as poaching of wildlife has stepped up in the lead up to Christmas. Volunteers have also been removing old wire fencing and rubbish from the veld like crazy. Excellent progress has been achieved at this daunting and never ending task. Sufficient data required for two research activities, baobab census and vegetation census, has now been collected and the report write ups for these will be available early in the New Year.

In this month's edition we hear from Svenja and Simon about their experiences at camp on pages 3 and 4. Keep up to date with the latest project update on page 6, written by Project Manager David Hancock, and plenty of photos to share on page 8!

I would like to take this opportunity to close my final Newsletter working for the Botswana Conservation project. My partner Dave and I have managed Motswiri Camp here in Botswana for the last 2 years. Each day has been filled with magical wildlife sightings, enthusiastic volunteers, exciting research, hard work made easy by team work, smiles and laughter as well as so many memories. Every day would unearth a new creature, a new wildlife experience which only amplifies a sense of wonder at the world we live in and the dire need to preserve this for all to share in.

We thank every volunteer who has been a part of the Botswana team for their incredible contributions to the amazing work done by the project, as well as for spreading that interest to assist in the conservation of the wonderful wildlife and unique environments all over the world. We also thank future volunteers for what they will bring to Botswana, its wildlife and its people. We eagerly anticipate the unravelling of the conservation story. How the project develops, each new step achieved towards our common goal.

We wish each and every one of you a happy Christmas and wonderful New Year!

Tess Harris and David Hancock
Operational Conservation Managers
Projects Abroad Wild at Tuli Conservation Project

A Very Merry Birthday!

Svenja Willmes, 32 years old, Germany, 10 week stay

Good morning Botswana! At 5:30 this morning, we woke Camilla with a birthday song in the bathroom!

This morning, we started at 6 am and drove to the two waterholes, in an area of the reserve called Little Serengetti, to clean the dirt out of them. When the next rain comes and they fill with water, it will be clean for the animals to drink. We finished the work quickly so we had enough time left to pick up some old wire fencing, which has been left on some of the kopjes near the camp, from the days when the reserve was used for cattle farming. We even had time for a lovely coffee break after our work. We then started a 'birthday game drive' to finish the morning activity.



Back in camp, Alice from France had already arrived back from her week away. We made birthday decorations for Camilla. Balloons, Danish flags and put them up around the boma. In the break, Camilla and Alex made Danish buns, a birthday tradition for them, and shared them with everyone. Lekker!

At 3:30pm, we started the afternoon activity. And then, unbelievably, it happened again! Quite near to the camp, about 3:45pm, we saw a leopard! He was next to our car, then sprang up and ran on top of a small kopje. All of us saw him, it was so great! Our activity was a mammal and bird census on a kopje, it was a very nice place!

Back at the camp, we packed up all our stuff and drove out for an open air birthday dinner out on the reserve. On our way we had the next great animal meeting of the



day, with a long Rock Python lying on the road. Dave put on the breaks in time and we had a nice look at this beautiful animal. Slithering, winding and rearing her head to get a better look at us, before disappearing into the bushes. We had an awesome outdoor dinner with elephants and wildebeest, balloons, marshmallows, cake and a fire. And this all in the middle of the bush!

It was a wonderful day with special surprises! Thank you!!! And good night Botswana!

So Many Birds, So Much Time

Simon Schouten, 55 years old, United Kingdom, 6 week stay

November and December are fantastic months here if you like bird watching. The summer visitors are arriving and the males are all in their vibrant breeding plumages. There is such a variety of birds to see!

Ground birds; with Francolin, Spurfowl and Guineafowl cackling in the bush, the bizarre Red-crested Korhaan with its 'suicide' display, the serious, slow moving Ground Hornbill and the Kori Bustard, lifting itself into the air like an overweight jumbo jet.

Birds of prey; so many types from Tawny and Fish Eagle to Falcon and Hawk, but the prize must be our discovering two huge black and white Verreaux's Eagles on their Rock Hyrax kill, with his more fortunate companion screeching an alarm from the nearby kopje.



Colourful birds; the ever present Woodland Kingfisher, trilling and flashing brilliant turquoise, the multi-coloured Barbets, rolling their rrr's in the canopy and the Bee-eaters, trilling and enjoying the abundant insect life.



Noisy birds; the Grey Go Away Bird, the Cuckoos calling incessantly, and by Motswiri camp the constant chatting of the Buffalo and Sparrow Weavers and in the night the haunting call of the Pearl Spotted Owlet.

Since being here (6 weeks), I have seen over 180 species of bird, assisted by Dave's brilliant knowledge of the birds here and their calls, plus a shout for Tess who helped with a few vital spots too!

Today, we set off to the wetlands near Solomon's Wall. What a place! Elephant, Waterbuck, Warthog, Baboon and Jackal watch our progress, and the results are fantastic. A plethora of water birds awaits. White-faced Whistling Ducks, Sacred Ibises, Spur-winged Geese, Cattle Egrets and a huge whirlpool of White Storks circling above the Egyptian Geese and majestic Saddle-billed Storks.



The Southern Carmine Bee-eaters have arrived this week and they flit about displaying their colours to compete with the best.

But the highlights are the Long-tailed Paradise Whydah, beating its wings, willing itself to make progress with its dragging tail and competing for the strangest flight pattern are the Yellow Crowned Bishop and its Red Bishop cousin, buzzing around like oversized honey bees.

What a great place this is! And just for a finale, we see our first impala babies on the drive home. The rich circle of life continues!



Wild at Tuli Project Update

Vegetation Census

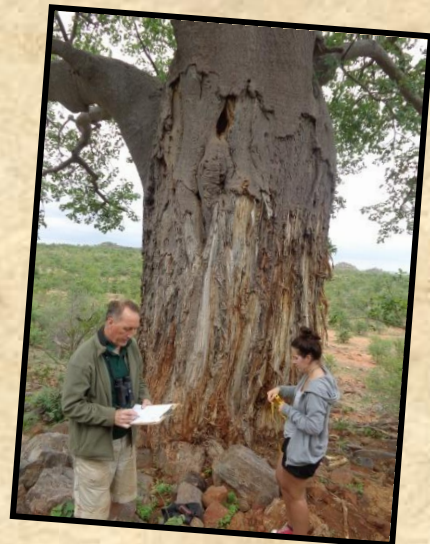
After a year and a half and 62 vegetation censuses the vegetation data set is now complete. The entire property, except for the kopjes, has been censused and the results will shortly be written up into an official report. 34 species of tree were recorded on the census and several more were noted but not sampled at any point.



Over the course of these censuses 6300 trees were sampled and 12400 substrate samples were recorded. Unsurprisingly the major substrate type across the property was bare soil making up 58% of the substrate type with other organic matter covering a further 18% of land. Mopane was also the most abundant species of tree on the property at 60%, of the other 33 species recorded only 5 species contributed more than 1% each to the total with Lowveld Clusterleaf, Raisin Bush, Red Bushwillow being the major contributors from the Mopane woodland and Large Feverberry and False-Forest Nettle being contributed from the riverine forest.

Baobab Census

In the last few weeks we have been conducting a rapid reassessment of the level of elephant utilisation on the baobabs across the property. The reason for this is that there have been several reports of trees fallen down due to the elephants utilising them. We have decided to discover which trees have fallen down and which ones have changed the most in the 6-12 months since they were originally censused. This information will give us a picture of which trees are at the greatest risk of collapse and therefore which trees we should focus our protection efforts towards.



Snare Removal

Since the last update on snare removal in October, we have visited the veterinary fence a further 4 times. We have located what appears to be a hot-spot of poaching activity close to where the drying racks were found in October. On these visits to the veterinary fence we have removed 68 snares from an area of just over 0.2km². Most of the snares removed are relatively fresh, having probably been placed there around the end of September.

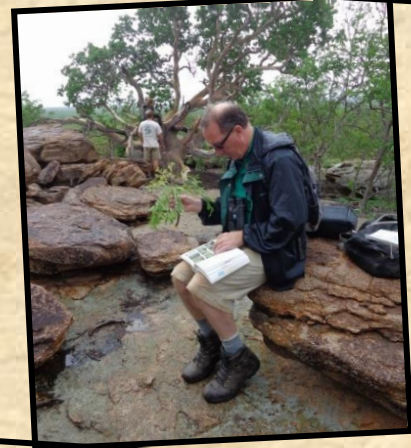
The area is located between two fences on a neighbouring property and situated around 2 major drainage lines. The fences and drainage lines make it a perfect area for attempting to catch animals, as they are drawn to water in the area but the area has limited access routes so it is very easy to cover all the options the animals have with snares so maximising their catch. We will continue to monitor this area in coming months to ensure any new attempts to set snares are thwarted and hopefully the poachers will give up trying.



Bush Memories



Clockwise from top left: before the Limpopo River comes down to flood the gorge; Greater Kudu enjoy the lush greenery of summer; identifying trees to add to the Wild at Tuli tree species list; Foam Nest frog makes it home at Motswiri; the bush has burst into life from a view atop a kopje; walking with Spotted Hyena; bird watching at Thune Dam.





Clockwise from top left: *Merry Christmas, bush style*; *Sacred Ibis* flocks roosting on the *Talana* wetland; rescuing the CA from its attempted river crossing; a *Leopard Tortoise* on a mission having awoken from torpor; a gorgeous sun sets over *Motswiri Camp*; *Saturday picnic* at *Solomon's Wall*; two *Impala* rams spar off in preparation for the rut.

