



The gang at Koro Camp before departing for the mornings activities

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# Editor's Note

Welcome to the February 2013 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

We have had a month of incredible wildlife sightings. More and more antelope proudly show off their young. We have enjoyed multiple leopard appearances, basking on rocks in the morning sun, peering up at us through the bushes and even two cubs playing on the top of a kopje (caught on camera trap footage!). The sighting of the month and probably for the history of the project, was watching a pack of African wild dogs hunt, terrorise and tease a herd of wildebeest with calves. Volunteers looked on with bated breath for what the outcome would be. One up for the wildebeest this time! Requiring so much land for hunting, these dogs come into constant conflict with local farmers and it is so rewarding to see a pack flourish and settle into the safe haven of our property.

The flowers at this time of year form a magical carpet of colour across the veld and volunteers have had a fun time identifying the great diversity of species, and removing those that we have found are not native to this country or area! A rather daunting task, as these alien species spread prolifically! Volunteer numbers swell, and it is fantastic to see how much we can achieve with so many willing pairs of hands.

Everyone has enjoyed the month of socials, giving volunteers the chance to explore some of the local area, dabbling in Botswana culture, natural and man-made wonders and of course, the occasional beer! Limpopo Lipadi gave another incredible wild dog sighting; we have picnicked at Solomons Wall and swum in the river at the gorge. Of course, frequenting the bar in the village of Mathathane provides access to that small taste of western civilisation: beer, music and dancing!

In this month's edition we hear from Aurore and Suzanne about their experiences at camp on pages 3 and 4. 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!

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# An Unexpected Encounter

**Aurore Lemoine, 28 years old, France, 2 month stay**

Today was amazing!

This morning, one group went to do 'snare removal,' while the other group were relaxing in the camp after their sleep-out. We started at 6am and on our departure, we met the other group coming back from the sleep-out. They said, "We have just seen the wild dogs!" I didn't know what wild dogs were, but it's extremely rare to see them.



Just at the exit of the camp, we saw 6 wild dogs along the road. They stayed in the middle of the road and let us take lots of pictures, like a bus of tourists! When they started to move off, we followed them alongside the bush. We found them on the airstrip, with two herds of zebra and wildebeest. We watched as the wild dogs hunted the wildebeest. It was unbelievable! They made a circle around the wildebeest, to prevent them from getting away. The wildebeest stayed together to protect themselves. A part of the herd attacked the wild dogs to defend the rest of the group, whilst the other half protected the calves. Nobody was killed during the encounter. It was a beautiful, stressful and amazing moment!



But the morning wasn't finished! When the wild dog gave up the game and ran away, we continued on our way. Suddenly, we saw a leopard crossing the road. Again, amazing! We are

very lucky! After all the excitement, we went to do snare removal, walking through the bush around the reception area and removing all the wire and old snares we came across.

The afternoon was less exciting but interesting. At 3:30pm we divided into 3 groups. The first gathered for a bird identification workshop (my group), the second for alien plant removal and the third for camera traps. In my group, we learned a lot of things about how to identify birds. It was interesting but will be very complicated!



# A Relaxing Saturday, with Munchies

**Suzanne Labreche, 67 years old, Canada, 1 month stay**

Around 9:30am, we set off for Mathathane, encountering impalas, wildebeest and baboons as we drove out of the camp. We headed to the village general store for munchies, drinks and other items the volunteers wanted. Along the way, we crossed paths with smiling children who ran towards the car, waving as we did in return. We also saw a donkey drawn carriage, going along their way. Outside the general store, I tried to talk to a boy and girl (6 or 7 years of age) and



could only understand that they attended school and wanted money. Instead, I gave them cookies and raisins and they thanked me by pressing both their hands over mine and giving me a huge smile. I did manage to get them to count to 10 in English with me. Another proud moment for them with big smiles. They soon disappeared around the corner as we left for our picnic destination.

We arrived at the Northern Tuli Game Reserve but not before Dave spotted lots of birds on a temporary wetland created by the recent floods. To name but a few, we saw kingfishers, herons, eagles, storks and widow birds, elephants drinking by a waterhole, ostrich farms (not so nice to see them in captivity) and a colony of minute frogs with a neon-green stripe down their back (Dave managed to pick one up for a photo-shoot; not a small feat! No pun intended). He managed to give us a lot of photo opportunities throughout the day. At the picnic site, Tess and Dave told us that the river bed had been dry until the last major rainfall. A lot of crocodiles that had escaped from a nearby crocodile farm during the heavy rain, have now made this area their new home. We could see the tracks from where they had slid into the water down the bank. Tess saw at least 7 crocodiles close to the shore.





The outing would not have been complete without Dave, Angus and Matts' contribution. Angus and Matt splurged (20 pula each) and bought a humongous bag of Cheesies, about 1.5kg! Pictures were taken and most of us tried a couple of these Cheesies. Based on the taste, we figured the expiry date had long passed. Someone had the bright idea to coax Angus into stuffing as many Cheesies as possible into his mouth and swallowing them. After a few gagging attempts, he managed 5 only. I say that because Matt managed at least 6 and Dave about 11!!! Pictures abound of this contest!



The drive back to the main house gave us more opportunity for wildlife sightings. The other group even watched a snake kill and swallow a lizard, right in the middle of the road! Some of us drove back to camp, while the others went for a swim at the gorge. It had to be about 40 degrees today, so several people took a dip in the camp pool. A few people played football and soccer, whilst dinner was being prepared by Anne (Denmark) and Harriet (UK). We dished out pasta, chicken and vegetables with headlamps on, as the power had gone out. Very tasty and enjoyed by all! Some sat around the fire talking while others played poker, read or wrote in their journals.





# Wild at Tuli Project Update

## Erosion Control

The heavy rain at the end of January caused millions of Rand's worth of damage in South Africa and Botswana, damaging property and washing away livelihoods. Environmentally, it also caused a huge amount of rapid erosion pulling top soil from flatlands, eroding riverbanks and enlarging dongas. All this soil will now be transported downstream and some will make it to the Indian Ocean where it will be deposited, possibly blanketing coral reefs and silting up quiet coastal backwaters. In an effort to control this wash off of soil into the rivers we have been focusing on repairing the dongas which have been created by excessive use of certain paths by livestock in the past. By filling the dongas with rocks, a lattice of sticks, soil and elephant dung we hope to reduce the speed of the water so any water using those channels will deposit the soil carried in the donga which will then fill naturally with sediment recreating a stable river bank.



## Flower Identification

On the plus side, with the summer rains came the transformation from barren wasteland to lush green pastures and with it a huge range of flowers. No formal or comprehensive investigation into the flowering plants of the reserve has ever been conducted so we have taken the opportunity to try and find and identify as many flowering plants as possible before the winter heat and dryness takes them away again. So far on the few outings we have taken we have been able to identify around 30 species of flowering plant with amazing names such as "Yellow Mouse-Whiskers" and "Bushveld Pig's Tail."



## **Alien Plant Removal**

Once the smaller plants and grasses began to grow and we were able to identify them we found that in the areas where cattle grazed, "Smelter's Bush," a species introduced from South America, had sprouted in large quantities. Whilst the plant is growing it is easy to find and remove so we have taken this chance to do so. So far we have cleared the northern side of the Top Hide drainage line to the furthest extent to the west that we could find it. There is still a lot to remove but it is satisfying work seeing the impact and extent of its removal.





# Bush Memories



Clockwise from top left: *dabbling in flower identification; vegetation census enthusiasm; a Golden Orb-web spider shows off her spinnerets; trying a hand at spoor (track) identification; Savannah baboons relax in the safety of the trees; repairing flood damaged roads; a young bull African elephant entertains himself at the waterhole.*







Clockwise from top left: overlooking the flowing Limpopo; an inquisitive leopard watches us watching him; a rainy day spent knitting blankets to donate to Mathathane; a magnificent Brown Snake-eagle soars from his perch; a pack of African wild dog surround a wildebeest herd; Southern Ground hornbill, the colours of summer; an African sunset is not to be missed!

