



October volunteers pose precariously over crocodile infested waters!

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# Editor's Note

Welcome to the November 2013 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

The rains are here! Immense bellows of thunder, magnificent streaks of lightening build up in the scorching heat. Life giving water bursts from the sky, enveloping the parched earth and satisfying every waterhole, niche and participant in the ecosystem. In immediate response, the reserve flurries into action! Leaves explode to coat the trees in every shade of green imaginable. Grass begins to carpet the dry top soil and flowers break out sporadically on trees, rocks and ground, adding touches of colour to the picture. Insects and arachnids pour from the woodwork in every possible shape and form. The birds are down to business, with the majority of summer migrants returned and nest building well under way, the colourful blaze of male breeding plumage, a gift to the eyes! The mammals herd to the waterholes, frolicking and basking in the new found sources of water. We await the onset of the birthing season with great anticipation!

The bustle of the veld seems to have spread contagiously to Motswiri camp as volunteer numbers soar to 18 over the last month. Fantastic to have so many keen conservationists at the ready to lend a helping hand! They have worked extremely hard, especially with the climbing temperatures. We have spent a couple of several day sessions staying at a neighbour's property, building dam walls to stop flooding as well as reburying a waterhole pipeline that elephants had managed to unearth. The waterhole now flows once more! Our wire removal efforts have been continued with vigour and volunteers have removed endless amounts of old wire fencing from the reserves surrounding our own. The rain brings with it bounties of vegetation and we have rekindled the creation of a Motswiri flower and grass herbarium, the growth of which had been stalled by the dry winter. Already we have identified several new flower species for this year!

In this month's edition we hear from Myunghee and Simon about their experiences at camp on pages 3 and 4. There is an update on the project over the last month on page 5, written by Project Manager David Hancock, and plenty of photos to share on page 7!

Enjoy our month of adventures!

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# By the Waters of the Thune

**Myunghee Suh, 39 years old, South Korea, 2 week stay**

Today we went to the Thune Dam bird census with Dave. It was such a peaceful morning! The tranquil waters of the river were moving along the gentle morning breeze like a shy little girls cheeks. Soft and bouncy ground washed out all the tiredness from my feet and made me walk lively. The sun was stretching out her bosom like a white dove and embracing us with her generosity. And Dave! How he loves the birds! Just walking beside him turned me into a bird lover! Even if I found it very hard to spot the birds and try to identify them from the bird book!



In the afternoon, we gathered rocks around the Baobab tree to protect them from being over utilised by the elephants. It was quite a work to do in the heat, but all the volunteers were putting their full efforts and were also very playful and laughing! We had this tall and muscular German guy, Gerrit (G for giant I guess!). Not only could he move all the big rocks that nobody could lift, but he also organised the job and conducted the people nicely. Everyone was so nice when they got tired. Instead of complaining of being tired, they threw elephant dung at each other and laughed!

After the wonderful job, we climbed up a rock mountain and watched the sun go down. It was a nice way to call it a day!

Helena and Judi baked us a chocolate cake for our hard work. Everyone was very happy.

# Lending a Helping Hand

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

We woke around 5:30am. Most of the flying beetles that have invaded the house in which we are staying had gone, but there are still many of the large hawk and mopane moths everywhere.

After breakfast, we set off for work. Alan, the owner of the house and responsible for managing Limpopo River Lodge, the reserve in which we are staying to help out, is worried that one of the dams which creates a large waterhole, isn't going to survive another flooding. Our job, then, was to try and secure the dam. There is a very large pile of rocks and we all set to carry these and placing them to strengthen various areas of the dam. The 'work out' boys, Ramesh, Karl and Gerrit, seemed to be having a competition of who could carry the biggest and heaviest rocks at the same time, but most of us just carried a few rocks at once. It is very hot work! Thankfully, Alan had brought us a cooler box with cold cokes and fanta, which were very much appreciated!



After the rocks were placed, we built a run off to release pressure should the dam flood. This required a few trips to collect sand and stones to make cement. Finally it was done. A few of the team members, Dave, Pierre, Karl, Belinda, Alice and Joanne, swam in the waterhole. Then it was back to the house for lunch!

That afternoon, a group went to the tourist lodge to swim in the pool (a more attractive proposition than the waterhole in my opinion)! AB took some of us for a scenic game drive later. We saw impala, kudu, waterbuck and steenbok as well as an elephant with its baby.

Afterwards it was back to the house for dinner. Is it me, or are there even MORE flying beetles in the house?!



# Wild at Tuli Project Update

## Flower Identification

The summer rains have brought the first of the flower blooms to the surface. We started this project at the beginning of this year so missed many of the early flowers last year. In 3 short sessions we have collected and identified over 20 new species including 3 new families. A great example of the early bloomers is the Aandblommetjie (*Pancratium tenuifolium*) which flowers soon after the first rains for one night only, before wilting and dying the following day.



Several other flowers which went unobserved last year such as Silwerbossie (*Leucosphaera bainesii*) and Poison Onion (*Dipcadi glaucum*) have appeared in such abundance, it is incredible that we did not notice them after the rains began last year. The flowers which are collected are placed into our press from which they will eventually, once they have properly dried, be added to our herbarium alongside the details of where and when they were found for future reference.

## Erosion Control

As the rains have started we have stepped up our erosion control work to try and prevent as much soil erosion as possible over the wet summer. One of the main tasks undertaken was constructing gabions on the bank of one of the islands on the river which has suffered serious erosion in recent years and it is cutting back deeply into the island. The gabions are large metal cages which we filled with stones once they were placed along the bank of the river. The idea is that the metal and stones create a new river bank which is solid and capable of withstanding the summer floods. As the gabions were placed on an island we had to transport all the rock across a bridge in order to fill the gabions. We moved over 10 tons of rock across the bridge in only 2 days.



### **Rubbish Collection**

In recent weeks we have done a lot of work removing rubbish from the edges of the public roads which run through and near Wild at Tuli. There is little respect for the environment locally and so rubbish is casually thrown from vehicles driving through the wilderness area and old farm machinery is left to decay in the bush rather than being removed to more suitable locations. This litter often ends up on the roads when people drop it or when animals inadvertently pull it out of the bush when they get entangled in it.

This is why it is important to remove it as quickly as possible because animals of all sizes can injure themselves and become trapped in this litter which ranges from old tyres to plastic bags and glass bottles. In the last month we have removed nearly 20 full rubbish bags of rubbish from the roads. However, even as fast as we remove it, it builds back up again on a daily basis as more waste is thrown from cars and dragged out of the bush by unwitting animals.





# Bush Memories



Clockwise from top left: *Woodland Kingfishers are back for the summer; chilling on a crocodile census; closing a hole in the community/wilderness boundary fence to prevent both wildlife and poachers from crossing over; Yellow-billed Stork; a dazzle of Plains Zebra; making Mopane branch barriers to prevent soil erosion.*







Clockwise from top left: *enjoying a swim in a sweet smelling waterhole; cleaning out an artificial waterhole in preparation for the rain; a Banded Mongoose takes sentry duty; identifying flower species to add to the project herbarium; Foam Nest frog perched on a branch; Bushman paintings at Lepokole Hills; Simon leads a team of enthusiastic chefs!*

