

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Botswana 



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Projects Abroad

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the June 2014 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

Autumn has arrived at Kwa Tuli! Majestic baobab trees have lost their leaves, bearing only their great fruits. The grass looks beautifully gold and everyone's socks can finally get some respite from the clinging seeds that are everywhere in summer! The rest of the vegetation begins to show the red and yellow colours that signal a transition. We have been enjoying warm sunny days under a cloudless blue sky and have mastered the art of snuggling into warm clothing at sunset. Breakfast time is a must-see: jackets, blankets, beanies and sunglasses... where are the skis?! ;)

Volunteers have discovered that elephants are quite messy giants. They are now used to cleaning up after them on a daily basis; removing branches from the roads after one of their pachyderm feasts so that we can use the same paths. However, this month, volunteers started a new type of elephant related job: waterhole maintenance. They placed branches on top of dam walls to prevent elephants from parading on it like they love to do. The elephant identification study is also evolving beautifully with the identification of new herds and bulls. Excited volunteers identified known elephants and named new ones, after taking pictures and drawing their distinctive features. Finally, a day was spent walking along the Limpopo River in search of crocodiles for our trimestral 2.5 km crocodile census!

Sightings have been great too. Two young spotted hyenas were found around a kopje at sunset; a beautiful leopardess was observed by wide-eyed volunteers; a magical herd of nearly 30 elephants peacefully approached our car for a perfect identification opportunity; and plenty of amazing birds were pointed out to volunteers including the rare sighted Marabou Storks!

In this month's edition, read on page 3 what Conservation Manager, Sophie Juget, has to say about what's been happening at the project over the past month. On page 4, we hear from Gaelle Marie and Anina Baer about their experiences in the African bush. And finally, there are plenty of photos to share on pages 5 and 6!

Enjoy our month of adventures!

Elsa Stamm
Camp Manager and Social Manager
Projects Abroad Wild at Tuli Conservation Project



PROJECT UPDATES

Crocodile Census

Picnics at the ready, all volunteers were ready for a day of walking by the Limpopo River to count crocodiles. The Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*) is a very important species for the freshwater ecosystem, and a good indicator of a healthy river. It is an unmistakable species that grows to up to 7m in length, weighs up to 1000kg and lives to be over a century old. Good weather is important to increase our chances of seeing the crocodiles outside of the water as they like to bask on the edge to soak up the sun. The crocodile is exothermic and needs the sun to increase its corporal temperature. We walked 2.5 km along the edge, taking care to be as quiet as possible as crocodiles are very sensitive to vibrations and they will go straight into the water if they suspect any danger. If they are in the water, it is much more difficult for us to estimate their size. Of the ten crocodiles that we saw, the largest was about 4.2m long, which is a good size for the area. All the volunteers really enjoyed the survey, the sun, the surroundings, and the fun of trying to be as quiet as possible to get closer to the animals (still maintaining 20m distance) and take pictures.



Dam Maintenance

Dams and any water source play an important role in stocking up on water for the winter, which is the dry season here. Some of our dams are permanent (there is water throughout the year) and some are temporary and drawn from over the course of the winter. A good dam needs to be waterproof across the bottom and the sides and in good shape to work properly. Elephants and other animals can affect whether the dam remains in good condition or not. Elephants are often seen walking along the edge and because of their weight (a big male can reach 6 tons), the edge can become weak and water can leak from it as a result. Together with the volunteers, we placed spikey branches along the top of the walls to protect the dam from being destroyed. Our previous attempts had been vanquished over time with the rain and animals causing the branches to fall in the dam. Sadly, nobody was willing to take a bath in the dam after our efforts but maybe next time they will. I had always thought that mud was good for the skin!



Elephant Identification

African elephants (*Loxodonta Africana*) are the largest land mammals on earth. A big male can eat up to 300kg a day and drink more than 100 litres per day. They need to cover a lot of land to find all the food and water that they need. Between winter (dry season) and summer (rainy season), how the elephants spread out can vary depending on water and food sources. A lot of them tend to gather around the waterhole in winter, which has a direct impact on the surrounding vegetation. Elephant identification is based on personal features like ear notches, tusk shape, tail hairs and any distinguishing element that can help to recognize an elephant. A hot afternoon, we went to water sources in the reserve to look for elephants. We were lucky enough to find a herd of 9 individuals with 2 females, 6 sub-adults and one child. We made note of the matriarch's remarkable traits and took lots of pictures to help recognize her and her family in the future. The volunteers really enjoyed the experience and learnt a lot of interesting facts about elephants. However, the most memorable moment was when the herd of elephants passed just 3 metres in front of our car.



VOLUNTEER STORIES

Visiting the local village!

Today was an awesome day. We went to the village where AB and Rex live. We left the camp at 10am. First, we met **AB's family** - his wife and two little boys. Afterwards, we made bracelets with Jane, a woman who lives there and who has a shop with homemade products. When we all finished our beautiful bracelets, we went to a beautiful place to eat our picnic. After lunch, we climbed to the top of the rocks and there was an amazing view. Then we went back to the village and we played soccer with AB and his boys. Some children came to see the game. We had such a good time. Then we went to the bar and had some cool drinks and talked to the local people. All of us wanted to stay but we had to come back. To finish the day off, Pauline and Hans made a really good dinner with delicious meat. It was a really good day.

Gaelle Marie, 21 years old, 3 months of stay, France

Bush Games

On Tuesday morning at 7.30am, everyone sat in the car ready to repair the road. We loaded shovels, picks and machetes beneath our seats so that we could remove stones and fill gaps with dirt and sand. The backseat was reserved for the wheelbarrow, which helped us to transport the sand. After a short and very cold car ride, we reached the bumpy road that we were meant to repair. We stripped off our warm clothes, which we needed for the drive, and started with the hard work. We shovelled and removed the heavy rocks from the road and filled the gaps with other stones, dirt and sand until it was very smooth to drive over.

In the afternoon, we hid cameras in the bush and covered them in chilli sauce to keep the wild animals away. Someone came up with the hilarious idea to play the dung spitting game, which involved everyone taking two kudu droppings each and spitting them as far as possible! On the way back to camp, we stopped at a riverbank because Elsa was curious about it. We were exploring the riverbed when suddenly the trees moved and a huge animal appeared. Our guides, Sophie and Elsa, signalled to move backwards slowly and from a distance, we observed the magnificent elephant.

Anina Baer, 23 years old, 1 month of stay, Liechtenstein



BUSH MEMORIES



Baby elephant



Anti-poaching



Beautiful Limpopo River



Crocodile



Elephant herd



Bird census



Crocodile census



Marabou Storks



Chilly mornings



Limpopo Lipadi



Bones



Thumbs up!