

# ASKARI NEWSLETTER

## APRIL 2009

### Overview



April has been an amazing month for sightings here at Askari. At one stage you couldn't leave the garden without bumping into lions or elephants! The cheetah coalition have spent their first month out of the boma and have even been spotted on a few kills. Along with the usual projects we have started some new work this month and have plenty to keep us busy. Read on to find out more about all this and what else the Askari team have been up to this month.

### Events on Pidwa

The first week of April was spent creating a map of Langa langa. With only a rough aerial map to work off, many hours were spent driving the roads, taking GPS readings and distance measurements. A map is now in place and all the roads on Langa langa have been named after insects. This will be a huge aid in monitoring the location of the cheetah and their movements around Langa langa.

During their first month out the boma the cheetah coalition have been monitored closely. We have been to visit them almost every day to check on their location, condition and activities. This has meant extra training for volunteers in the use of the telemetry kit (receiver & aerial) in order to track their whereabouts. After the first week, which they spent on the northern Pidwa fence, the boys have really



been exploring and covered most areas of Langa langa on their travels. They have been seen with 2 juvenile impala meals but we were very shocked one day to find them with a giraffe kill! Admittedly only a juvenile but it is very rare for cheetah to take down giraffe. The carcass was lying in a drainage line so it is possible they had a little help from the youngster tripping or falling into the ditch. Even so, there were teeth marks in the neck so the boys knew exactly what they must do! They spent 3 days with the carcass

consuming everything except the neck, head and legs. Although often looking like they need a meal we have never seen the boys in a desperate condition so

are confident they will grow from strength to strength and become a highly effective hunting team!

New volunteer arrivals meant the formation of a new group for April “The Lone Mulanger”.

## Reserve work

Plenty of tree watering has been going on this month. Now that the rains have slowed down, our sapling population are starting to droop. All recently planted saplings receive a weekly “cooler box” full of water to their roots to help them on their way.

Erosion control continued on Central outline on the last remaining patches that can be repaired by hand. Old, ineffective brush packing was removed. The soil was then picked, new seed sown and fresh umbrella thorn brush packing placed on top.



The monthly clean of the nyala camp feeding bays and troughs took place early on this month and Askari have continued to assist Christof with the feeding. Also, in the top nyala camp a new marshy area has been created. The common reedback love boggy, marshy ground so we hope that they will like their new area. The pipe running from Askari’s borehole into the nyala camp was tapped into and a new tap placed on. In future, when the borehole is on, water will pump out onto the surrounding grass to flood it. Four fever trees were also planted around the newly fitted tap.

Three anti-poaching patrols were carried out in the buffalo camp this month. One in the area used by poachers in February last year, one in the block where snares were found in November last year and one in the blocks to the west of Leopard pan. Thankfully no snares, old or new, were found during patrols.



This month we began a reed relocation project. Common reed grass was dug up from the Selati river and taken to Hide dam. Here, it was planted on the waters edge in view of the bird hide. We hope that the reeds will attract a number of bird species who like to nest and hide in the reeds.

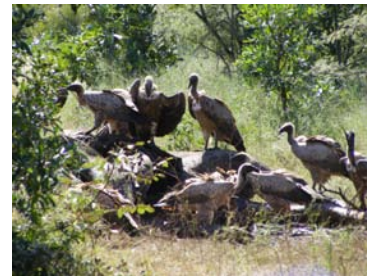
Monitoring drives continued to collect herbivore age and sex ratios. They also act as a great opportunity to get out on the reserve and see what other animals are around.

## Monitoring projects

**Weather monitoring** – Winter has hit with a vengeance this month and we have recorded a lowest temperature of just 12°C. A maximum of 31°C was recorded and 16 mm of rain fell.

**Herbivore Age & Sex Ratio monitoring** - Research drives have continued to collect data on herbivore age and sex ratios. These are also a chance to monitor as much predator and elephant activity as possible and to continue collecting information for animal ID kits. This month on research routes elephant, cheetah and rhino were seen.

**Birds of Prey** – The death of a giraffe on main access this month attracted over 100 vultures. White backed, Cape, Lappet and Hooded vultures were all seen feeding on the carcass. Amongst other birds sighted were a gymnogene, a lizard buzzard, 3 bateleurs and 2 dark chanting goshawks.



**Identification kits & Reserve records** – Reserve records continue to be updated with all sightings made by the Askari team. A new ID kit was made for Nkosana this month, one of the male cubs of the Askari pride. He has out-grown his previous kit and takes after his dad, Umfokazi, more every day. A new rhino cow was also seen with 2 calves. She has 3 notches in her left ear and has therefore been named 'Kenya' which means "cut a notch" in Tsonga.

## Sightings & Other news

**Lions** – There have simply been too many lion sightings this month for me to list



them all individually. The pride and Umfokazi provided the majority of the sightings but we are 90% sure that we also bumped into 2 new lionesses who we previously didn't know about.

They were seen with

Umfokazi on Boerbean road and although we couldn't confirm for sure that they weren't the Askari pride females they just didn't look quite right. We have suspected



for a while that there are 2 females using the area around the buffalo camp. It is possible that these were the 2 we spotted that day. An adult male giraffe also died this month after hitting his head on a transformer box. That was in the middle of Askari pride territory so we eagerly waited for 3 hours at the carcass one night to see the feeding frenzy. No-one turned up....or the night after that but finally on day 3, the Askari pride cubs found the carcass. We then had a guaranteed lion sighting whenever we wanted, just up the road on Main access. They fed there for 2 days and weren't afraid to get stuck in and even crawl inside the giraffe as you can see!

**Rhino** – Only a few rhino sightings this month, one was Isinkwe & Nembelela on Selati loop. On another 2 occasions these 2 boys were seen showing some interest in a new cow in the area. 'Kenya', as she will be known, has 2 calves at foot. One is approximately 1 and a half years old and the other 3 years. It is thought that the older calf does not belong to her but has rather adopted her as a mum as the two calves are too close in age to both be hers.



**Elephants** - Again, far too many sightings to mention all individually but there were plenty of elephants out there to see this month. Breeding herds, lone bulls and even some grumpy boys in musth. Sightings were mainly around the northern Pidwa fence, on Main access, Combretum and different areas of the Selati river. On two occasions, herds were seen swimming in the pool under the bridge just by the Pidwa main gate.

**Cheetah** – Makwavo has been seen on 8 different occasions this month but unfortunately his brother Busayo only once. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April we found Busayo & Makwavo sitting on the northern Pidwa fence, opposite the 3 boys from the Langa coalition. Neither group seemed bothered by the other, even though there were just 5 metres and a fence between them. We saw Busayo stand up and wander off into the bush and that was the last time we ever saw him. Later that afternoon, Makwavo was alone and has remained so ever since. Although we searched for a carcass nothing was ever found. Maybe Busayo had a run in with the lions or maybe it was just his time. The good news is that after his initial distress and patrolling of the fence searching for his brother, Makwavo has been seen alive and well. He killed a bushbuck just a day after his brothers death and continues to use the same areas as they did when they were together. It will be a tough ride for him now without his brother so we wish him well!



**Crocodile** – It seems that we were under a false pretence in thinking there were no crocodile on Pidwa! This month a fairly large crocodile, possibly a few metres long, was seen by the McCormicks in a dam in the buffalo camp. We have attempted to find it a few times since but as yet we've had no joy. It's possible that the breaking of the fences with floods this year allowed a few more animals than just 2 hippos to cross in!

**Serval** – An adult Serval was seen bounding across Bushbaby road in broad daylight this month.

- A good few hours were spent sorting through children's books this month and clothing and belongings left behind by volunteers. A trip was then made to Daktari wildlife orphanage to drop all the items off. At Daktari they take children from a local school for a week at a time for environmental education. The books will go towards helping these children in their learning and also be taken back to the families of the children who come from the local community.

## Monkey Business



We are pleased to report that Colin is doing well at his new home, the Vervet monkey rehabilitation centre. We paid a visit this month and found one of the volunteers there to tell us all about his (her) progress and plans for the future. He is still with his slightly mental mate Felix and they have moved house to a larger enclosure. This is based next door to one of the existing troops. From here they can communicate with and touch the other monkeys through the fence before they make the big step of finally moving in. Apparently when this happens depends very much on the monkeys but when ready, they will let the staff know!