

# ASKARI NEWSLETTER

## AUGUST 2008

### Overview



August, and the Limpopo province has officially been declared a drought area. Many of the animals are suffering from the lack of available food and bush fires have been ripping through much of the country. Along with a few unfortunate animal deaths though have come new births and as we wait for the much needed rain there is plenty

of work to keep us busy. Read on to find out what the Askari team have been up to this month.

### Events on Pidwa

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August young male leopard Nghwazi was seen outside the buffalo camp on Steenbuck road. Again he was very relaxed and lying down in the



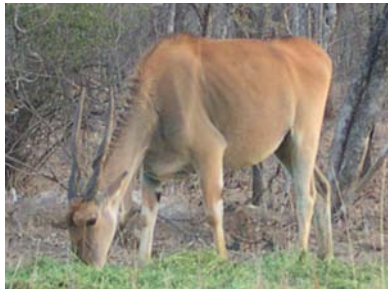
sunshine before strolling off into the open system. This sighting got us wondering. Does he perhaps live in the open system and just nip into the buffalo camp for a drink or is it the other way around? Is there a particular reason why he would cross the fence boundary between the two sections? That same day we found a

warthog corridor on the northern buffalo camp fence. Here, warthogs have dug away the dirt from under the fence and are therefore free to pass between the open system and buffalo camp. This is good for genetics and other animals also use these corridors.....including leopard it would seem!

We started to monitor movements through this corridor by scraping the ground either side of the hole and checking for new tracks made every morning and evening. To our surprise we actually discovered that a female leopard is also using the corridor on a more frequent basis than the male. Both leopards however do seem to live in the buffalo camp and only visit the open system every few days or once a week. Whenever we found tracks leaving the buffalo camp there was another set going back in within a time frame of between 12 and 24 hours. Perhaps Nghwazi's movements are in fact influenced by those of the female?

We will continue to keep a close eye on the area. As leopards are extreme creatures of habit, the area may well provide us with a hot-spot for leopard sightings in the future.

The Eland in the buffalo camp are being particularly hard hit by the drought this winter. The decision was therefore taken to provide supplementary feed for the herd of about 32 animals in the camp. Bails of lucerne are distributed each day between leopard pan in the north of the camp and Hide dam further in the south. Already an improvement in their condition has been seen and they certainly appear to be very thankful! Each day they are there waiting for us now and have become much more relaxed and tolerant of the vehicles.



Those of you who were lucky enough to see them in the buffalo camp will remember it was always a fleeting glance as they ran away! Unfortunately the supplementary feed has come a bit too late for 2 adults which have died this month; however 2 new babies have been born in their place. One baby was found to have been abandoned by its mother. She was brought back to Askari but unfortunately was already too weak and did not make it through the first night. Other game has also been seen taking advantage of the daily deliveries including nyala, rhino, zebra and wildebeest. Supplementary feeding will continue until the rains come.

## Reserve work

Road-clearing was completed on Porcupine this month. All branches and overhanging trees have been cut back and the next road on the list will be Sickleshub in the buffalo camp. The good news for Magnolia is that despite the pressures of giraffe feeding she is producing a new sprout almost daily and looking good.

The newly built and varnished steps are in place on the hide at Hide dam. Shelves have been cut to size and are having their last few coats of varnish before being ready to put in place.

Following game capture last month there have been a few new tracks created around Pidwa north. The heavy trucks transporting game were unable to make very tight turns and therefore in some places cut corners wearing the grass away there. Brush packing was therefore carried out in these places to prevent further use of these tracks and hence giving them a chance to re-generate. In most instances, branches already broken off by elephants were used to create a barrier for vehicles. The 2 sites where the capture funnels were set up were also cleared, removing fruit peels, paper, metal debris etc.

A fence patrol was carried out along the eastern boundary close to Ranch Dam. Although the reserve was experiencing a power cut at the time the fence was still checked for over-grown vegetation, holes and damage.

The Fantastic four will remember monitoring nyala water consumption during their time at Pidwa. Those calculations were used this month when the nyala in the top camp were administered their de-worming medicine. Their usual water trough was covered with plastic sheeting and a temporary 60 litre tub filled with water instead. Once the nyala were used to this new tub the de-wormer was measured into the correct volume of water relative to the make up of the herd in the camp. The water was successfully consumed by the nyala over night.



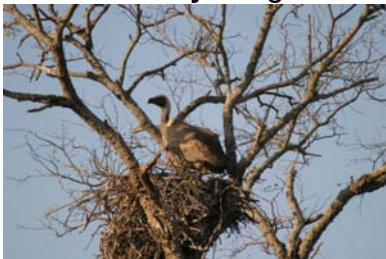
Monitoring drives continued to collect herbivore age and sex ratios. They also act as a great opportunity to get out on the reserve and see what other animals are around. During research routes this month elephant, rhino and honey badger were seen. Lions were also seen attempting to make a bushbuck kill.

## Monitoring projects

**Weather monitoring** – August has seen the start of the warmer weather and a high of 34°C was recorded. Unfortunately the rising temperatures have brought warm berg winds which coupled with the dry bush are the cause of many fires across the country. Luckily no fires have broken out on Pidwa although we remain on high alert until the rains come.

**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.

**Birds of Prey** – Again there continues to be a huge number of vultures seen on



Pidwa including white backed, cape, lappet faced and hooded. Three different white-backed vulture nests have also been seen with young inside. A martial eagle has been seen a number of times both sitting and flying close to the Askari house and nyala camp.

**Identification kits & Reserve records** – This month we managed for the first time to get photos of the tiny rhino calf in the buffalo camp with its mother. Work will begin on an ID kit for this female using the photos.

## Sightings & Other news

**Cheetah** – Busayo & Makwavo were just seen twice this month. Once on Marula cutline and once on the airstrip. There have been reports of them looking very skinny and now being 13 years old we have to expect that they may be on their way out. The purchase of 4 new cheetah from the DeWildt conservation group however has been confirmed. Measurements for their holding boma have been taken and once permits are in place work will begin as soon as possible.

**Lions** – August has been a good lion month. The Askari pride females and 6 cubs have been seen on 4 different occasions. Once was just across from the house on the northern side of the Selati and twice they were on the eastern side of the nyala camp just a few hundred metres from Askari. The cubs continue to grow.



Zingela & Tumblelea have been seen twice and appear to have a new man in their lives! An adult male who normally stays on Makalali seems to have moved up to Pidwa to try and get away from the male coalition of 3 down on Garonga. The first time he was seen he had an injury to his front left leg and was not putting any weight on it at all. Perhaps he has already met up with Umfokazi who is the dominant male in Pidwa north. He will have to watch his back if he wants to continue using the females and locations within Umfokazis' territory!



Masana and Mumu were seen in their regular spot at Cutline dam where Mumu was attempting to stalk impala. Again, active in the heat of the afternoon, the impala were

well aware of her presence!

**Rhino** – Isinkwe and Nembelela have been seen twice this month at Ranch Dam. The majority of rhino sightings however were in the Buffalo camp. The female with the young calf has been seen numerous times, often taking advantage of the lucerne for the eland. Isikhumba and the female with sub-adult calf have also



been seen.

**Elephants** - A mixture of lone bulls and breeding herds continue to use Pidwa north. Again all these sightings are in the usual places, around the Selati river, Eland loop, the airstrip and Double gate road.

- A new nyala has been born in the bottom breeding camp. An adult breeding bull has also been introduced to the bottom camp to replace the bull who escaped when the fence was broken many months ago.
- A honey badger was seen during a research route in daylight on New road.



- Unfortunately 2 adult male kudu have died this month and an adult male bushbuck. All appear to have died from starvation. A dead adult male giraffe was also found in the drainage line on Jackal plains which perhaps fell or was chased by a predator.

- 2 new-born giraffe have been spotted in the buffalo camp.
- A number of kills have been discovered this month made by a variety of predators. On Grysbok a leopard kill was found. It was an adult male impala, perhaps made by the leopard male which has been seen in that area on a few occasions? A bushbuck kill was found on Jackal plains, most likely made by lions. The adult male lion whom has been seen with Zingela and Tumblela was seen with a warthog kill at Ranch dam and the Hide dam male leopard was also seen with a kill. He caught an adult male warthog which he dragged up onto a small koppie on the western buffalo camp fence where he was seen feeding.
- Attempts have been made to sex the hippo living in the Selati river this month. Although its tracks have been seen on both the northern and southern sides of the river we have yet to find it out of the water. Efforts will continue so reserve management can determine what gender friends to buy it!
- There has been a lot of spotted hyena activity around Askari throughout August. They have been heard vocalising close to the house on a number of occasions and plenty of tracks have been seen around the nyala camp, Combretum and Double gate road. We are still searching for a den.

## ‘Lion’ Watch

Whilst heading to Langa langa to carry out some work this month, Leon found himself on the wrong side of the fence. Upon hopping out to open a gate he then closed it again but locking himself OUT of the reserve! Staff were very confused and looked to Pierre for an explanation. At which stage Pierre just shrugged his shoulders and Leon admitted “That’s one of the most stupid things I’ve ever done!”

