

ASKARI NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2008

Overview



team have been up to this month.

The rain has continued to hammer down on Pidwa this month and the bush is so thick it's hard to picture the terrible drought just a few months ago. Warthog and wildebeest babies join the huge number of impala young and the cheetah boma fence has been erected after hours of work creating the boma interior itself. Read on to find out more about this and what else the Askari

Events on Pidwa

Now that the Askari team had finished their work it was time for the fencers to move into the cheetah boma site on Langa langa. Due to a drainage line towards the back of the boma it was not possible to create a 100 x 100 metre square boma. It was therefore decided to erect 5 main posts so we could still achieve the size required but also eliminate sharp angles in the fence. With 5 main posts, only one corner is a right angle whereas the others are all obtuse. This is preferable for the cheetah if any darting or capture is required within the boma as the corners are not as threatening for them to run into. The boma now requires an inspection by DEAT (the Department of Environment & Tourism) and hopefully the cheetah will arrive after the Christmas break.

Rocks were collected from the Selati river to pack into the dam wall of Askari pan. These were to reinforce the soil and give extra support. Unfortunately our first attempt at filling the pan found water running out into a nearby termite mound so a solution to this will be looked at in the new year.

"The World Wildcat Association & Co." was still with us for the first week of December.

Reserve work

Road-clearing was completed on Hartebeest road in the Buffalo camp this month and all stumps choppered. Newly planted saplings were watered regularly and "The Matterhorn", "N-see", "Van Pupstein", "Pete", "Magnolia", "Puppert", "In

memorial” and “Jack Russel” are all doing well! “The Beatles” looked a little weary on Jackalberry plains but some water soon saw to that.

Sleep out this month took place across the Selati river on Jackal plains. Colin enjoyed the whole night outing and wasn't fazed by the sound of lions to the south and also a number of elephants crashing around in the river.

Askari members continued to assist Christof with feeding of the nyala and this was completely taken over by Askari staff during the Christmas break. Both feeding bays were cleared of old lucerne and water troughs cleaned. Branches over-hanging the roads in much of the camp were cleared to allow ease of traveling in vehicles for counting and future darting operations.

Alien plant treatment began on Langa langa this month. It was mainly prickly pears that were found and treated but there are plenty more to work on next year.

A large number of anti-poaching patrols took place this month after the recent discovery and removal of many snares. Patrols were carried out around Leopard pan, Buffalo pan and Hide dam. Only a few old snares were found but none that had been newly set.

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 – A total of 150mm has fallen during December creating many new areas of water for the animals to use. Small rivers have even started to flow across roads where drainages cross. The highest temperature recorded was 35°C and the minimum 19°C.

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 – There continue to be plenty of white backed vulture sightings all over Pidwa. This month a flock of 19 Eastern red footed Kestrel were seen flying over Bushbaby road.

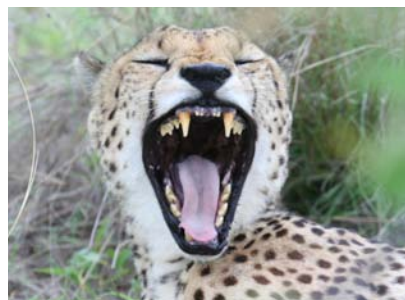
Identification kits & Reserve records – Reserve records continue to be updated with all sightings made by the Askari team.

Sightings & Other news

Cheetah – Busayo & Makwavo were seen twice this month. Once relaxing on Tshukudu road & another afternoon walking close to the staff compound.



week later at Eland pan.



Lions – The Askari pride have been seen 4 times this month. Twice with pride male Umfokazi and two occasions with just the females and cubs. With Umfokazi they were seen relaxing on Jckalberry loop and then a

Rhino – There have been 3 rhino sightings this month. One adult female with a calf of approximately 2 years on Central cutline and Isinkwe & Nembelela were seen at Klip pan. An unknown adult male was spotted on Bushbaby.

Elephants - Just the one sighting of elephants this month when they came for a drink at the airstrip pan on Christmas eve. It was a breeding herd of about 20 elephants.

- 6 black backed jackals were seen taking down an impala lamb on Jackalberry plains on the 16th of December.
- Pidwa welcomed a new staff member at the end of December in the form of Tommy! After working with Askari for 3 months Tommy has been taken on by reserve management. Pierre may live to regret this decision if Australia beat South Africa in too many forthcoming sporting events as Tommy is in fact our own Australian staff member. Welcome to the team Tommy.

Monkey Business



Colin had an eventful month what with his mum abandoning him to go on holiday and having to move up the road to HQ. He survived the snakes and baboons though and enjoyed the fruit trees of the HQ garden. It would seem he hasn't learnt how to handle his alcohol just yet though as he had a little too much wine on Christmas day and proceeded to fall out a tree!