

ASKARI NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2009

Overview



Happy New year to all Askarians! 2009 promises to be a great year on Pidwa with plenty of upcoming events and projects. The year started with a bang when the 3 new cheetah arrived and were released into the boma. Nyala darting took place and orphaned animals once again found their way to Askari! Read on to find out more about this and what else the Askari team have been up to so far in 2009.

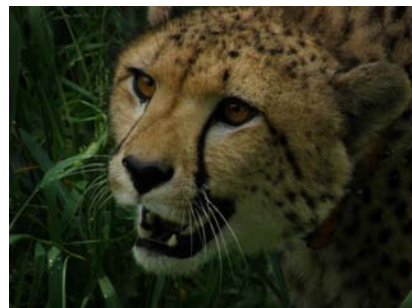
Events on Pidwa

With the perimeter fence erected and ready to go DEAT (the Department of Environment & Tourism) were brought onto Pidwa to inspect the boma. They needed to ensure it met the necessary requirements for holding the cheetah. Not only did it pass inspection with flying colours but several comments were made on the high standard and professionalism of the boma. A huge well done and thank you to all the teams who put work towards the boma. The 13th of January



was the big arrival day and Luke from DeWildt arrived just before 6pm with the 3 boys, each in their own crate, on the back of the trailer. It didn't take long to unload each crate and carry it inside the gate. Just a few moments later the doors were lifted and the 3 cheetah darted off into the boma. They didn't go too far before turning around for a quick look and then they wondered off to explore. Askari have been taking food to the cheetah every fourth day.

They get either an adult or yearling male impala. They are incredibly curious and one even put his front paws up on the bonnet of the game viewer! They certainly know that a vehicle can signal a meal so often come and wait at the gate when they hear you coming. We then do a quick charge to get them away from the gate while we drive in. They eagerly follow behind the vehicle just a metre away waiting for delivery and when we reach a suitable spot we push it off while the vehicle's still moving. They grab it in no time



and we've had some great sightings watching them get stuck in. Their collars have been tested and are in fine working order. We'll keep you updated on their progress.



A new orphan arrived at Askari this month in the form of a paradise flycatcher. It was rescued from Marley's mouth and brought to Askari to be reared. He was named Beakface.....I bet you can't guess who came up with that original name? No you're right, it wasn't Joe at all! He started off very well and was very vocal when needing food but unfortunately, as so often happens with birds, we woke one morning to find him dead. RIP Beakface.

It was time for nyala darting again this month. Askari were once again in charge of prepping the trailer the night before and it was an early start at 5am on the 29th. The weather couldn't have been better, cool and overcast but no rain. In total 11 nyala were removed from the breeding camps and relocated to the buffalo camp. This was made up of 2 sub-adult males from the bottom camp and 1 adult female & 8 sub-adult males from the top camp. The operation went very smoothly and no casualties resulted. Well done and thanks to the "nyala re-location team" and vet Paul Meyer.



New volunteer arrivals meant a new group was formed for January, "Colin's Angels & Beakface".

Reserve work

Two new saplings were planted this month on the opposite side of the road to the erosion site in the buffalo camp. “Giraffe canopé” the Natal mahogany and “Juliette” the Wild mango are both enjoying the recent rain in their new spots.



Sleep out this month took place in the Selati river near the 4x4 course. Luckily the weather held and lions were heard throughout the night.

Askari members continued to assist Christof with feeding of the nyala. Both feeding bays were cleared of old lucerne and water troughs cleaned and re-filled.

Alien plant treatment continued in the block behind Askari house treating Queen of the night and prickly pear cacti. A lot of lantana was also cut out around the nyala shed and Main access and the stumps poisoned. Another alien plant called Datura, originally from South America, has also been tackled this month. Many individual plants have been pulled out by hand around the nyala shed, in the nyala camps and in the buffalo camp.



Many sessions were carried out on the erosion site in the buffalo camp. “The International Lanyard Society” will remember that this work started during their stay. The photo to the left shows one of the newly planted saplings, now surrounded by grass, the Lanyard society would not recognise the place!

There were however a few patches which haven’t worked so “Colin’s Angels & Beakface” saw to that. Areas which remain bare had brush packing removed, were picked again using hand picks and forks and seeded. Sicklebush was then collected from the encroached area on sicklebush road and the bare soil re-packed with brush.



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 84.6mm rain fell in January. The average highest temperature was 31.6°C and the lowest average 22.7°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. This month on research routes elephant were seen.

Birds of Prey – This month gave a real variety of bird of prey sightings from the usual White backed vultures to Steppe eagle, Steppe buzzards, African Hawk eagles and a few different flocks of Eastern red footed kestrels. We seem to bump into the same Little banded goshawk every time we go to the cheetah boma on Langa langa. We also observed a Yellow billed hornbill nest this month on Ranch road.

Identification kits & Reserve records – Reserve records continue to be updated with all sightings made by the Askari team. We are in the process of obtaining new photos of the cheetah coalition in the boma so we can identify them individually and create ID kits by the time they are released.

Sightings & Other news

Lions – This month the Askari pride delayed a trip to the pub! On our way down Main access to “In di bos” we bumped into the 6 cubs lounging on the road. The pride were seen again, this time with Umfokazi, the following week walking by the Langa langa fence in the midday heat. Again Umfokazi was with the other 8 pride members when they were seen on Eland loop. Pierre was lucky enough to spot 5 new cubs this month on Bushbaby. 3 were so small they could hardly walk, estimated at 4 weeks old. The other 2 were possibly slightly older. Although he did see 2 females in the long grass it was not possible to identify them. We believe the mothers are Zingela & Tumblela based on previous data and observations of the pair.

Rhino – There have been 3 rhino sightings this month. An unknown adult male was spotted once at Cutline dam and once at Mopane dam in the open system. Memfuzza and her calf and WRf1 & WRf3 were seen early one morning in the buffalo camp when we went down to release nyala.



Elephants - Just one bull elephant was seen this month as he strolled down Ranch road. Stuck behind him for a good 55 minutes we were finally able to take over when he popped into Klip pan for a drink.

- A tiny baby Red hartebeest was spotted with its mother in the buffalo camp.
- A small female leopard was seen on Combretum road just a kilometre south of the Askari house.
- Askari were treated to an amazing light show one night this month as we came across the river to the sight of hundreds of fire flies. Flashing their green bums on and off it had us mesmerised for a good 10 minutes.
- A Zanzibar style beach was added to the swimming pool with sand collected from the river bed. The floating crocodile continues to plague Colin.....who can't quite understand why his troop is crazy enough to go in the water with it!
- We say farewell to Leon "Lion" Mason this month who is moving on to new adventures. Thank you to Leon for everything he has put into Pidwa over the last 18 months and we will miss you and your Leon ways! A new student will be joining us in February.

Monkey Business



Colin was pleased to have some new arrivals to his troop this month. In between his usual monkey tricks he did plenty of grooming, cuddling, travelling and working around the reserve. In fact we even managed to tire him out a few times, so much so that he would take himself straight to bed (on top of the air conditioning unit) once we got home.

