

# ASKARI NEWSLETTER

## JULY 2008

### Overview



July was the month for moving game! 13 nyala were removed from the breeding camp to be translocated and the big task of game capture took place in the buffalo camp to move animals to the open system. Read on to find out about these events and what else the Askari team have been up to this month.

### Events on Pidwa

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July vet Paul Meyer came to Pidwa to dart and re-locate nyala. The trailer was prepared first thing in the morning and darting in the top camp started soon after. We were removing adult females and sub-adult males. Once a suitable animal was selected from the herd it was darted by the vet. It then took about 5 minutes for the drug to take effect during which time it was important to keep sight of the darted animal. When it ran with the herd this proved quite tricky but luckily a side-effect of the drug caused the tail to lift and reveal the white hair underneath giving a beacon to follow!



Once down the animal was secured by the vet on the ground. In some cases he used his hand or a cloth to lure the animal towards him; as the drug also makes the nyala very inquisitive and almost enter a trance. The nyala was then administered the reversal drug and blindfolded to reduce stress before being loaded onto the land cruiser and then the trailer. Overall the darting was a success with 4 females and 3 sub-adult males being

released into the buffalo camp and 4 females and 2 sub-adult males being sold to a neighbouring reserve.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July the game capture unit “Bundox” arrived on Pidwa to remove game from the Buffalo camp. The target species were blue wildebeest and zebra to be released into the open system and impala to be taken out for sale. After a day of setting up the boma, capture was ready to begin on the Monday morning. The capture funnel was about 150 metres long and had a series of curtains inside creating different sections leading to a final tunnel and the loading trucks.

Once a target herd of animals had been found they were chased towards the entrance of the funnel by helicopter.



On entering the funnel the helicopter then used sirens to signal to people on the ground when they should close each curtain and therefore that section of the funnel. First to be captured were blue wildebeest. Once in the funnel the animals become stressed and aware they have been captured. The wildebeest were

therefore reluctant to move through to the different sections of the funnel and towards the truck. They were politely persuaded by people on the ground shouting and waving cloth to push them into the next section. Finally the animals were loaded onto the truck where they were separated if necessary and males given a sedative if needed. The day ended with 82 wildebeest having been removed from the buffalo camp. 50 of these were released onto Langa langa and the other 32 into the open system.



Tuesday was taken up by re-setting the boma in a different location and capture started again on Wednesday. 17 zebra were captured in total, all of which were released into the open system. 76 impala and a further 11 wildebeest were then removed to be sold. Overall the capture was a great success. Unfortunately 1 wildebeest died the following day trying to get back into the camp and one zebra also died on the northern fence line. The predators were quick to take advantage of the new prey and two lions were seen to have killed a newly released wildebeest as well as the cheetah males Busayo & Makwavo who killed a released juvenile zebra.

## Reserve work

Road-clearing started this month on a new road, Porcupine. To date almost two thirds of the road is clear of overhanging branches and trees. Unfortunately a large male giraffe has discovered Magnolia, the natal mahogany. He has managed to reach over the brush packing and eat many of the leaves! A few remain however and we are hoping that she will make it through the winter!

Restoration of Hide Dam continued with the whole of the outside having now been painted with carbolineum.

Anti-poaching patrols were carried out on Langa langa this month. As there is not much activity on the new property and because it borders the gravel road we want to show a presence there to deter any possible poaching. No tracks or snares were found in the areas searched.

Sleep out took place down by Duiker road this month. Elephants and spotted hyena were heard close by throughout the night and in the early hours a lion male passed by the camp. Although we only got a quick glance in the spotlight before he dashed off we suspect it was the Askari pride male Umfokazi. He was definitely on a territorial patrol as continued to the east vocalising loudly and every few minutes.



A reserve clean-up session took place close to the fishing spot on Nyala road this month. Two hi-lux loads of old fence posts, wire etc were removed and taken back to headquarters.

Many Queen of the night and Prickly pear alien plants were treated this month. Once injected with MSMA herbicide the Prickly pears especially die very quickly so it's great to drive around and now see them dying off.

The 3 metre rock perimeter around the first common false thorn has been completed. Although elephants have recently broken branches off the tree they are unable to reach the trunk to ring bark. Work has now started on the 2<sup>nd</sup> tree.

Fixed point photography was a new project started this month. By re-taking a series of photographs from the same point at regular intervals, a visual record can be obtained and later used for analysis. Photos of erosion sites around Grysbok and Flakythorn were taken allowing reserve management to monitor the speed and extent of erosion at each of these sites and how it is changing over time.

A fence patrol was carried out along the eastern boundary close to Ranch Dam. Volts and Amps were checked and any vegetation touching the live wires removed. A small herd of elephants were seen during the patrol.

A nocturnal drive was carried out this month. It was quiet on the nocturnal species front but a bull elephant was seen on Granite road.



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 rhino (including the baby in the buffalo camp), lion, cheetah, elephant and leopard have all been seen as well as honey badger.

## Monitoring projects

**Weather monitoring** - July continued to be cold with a low of 8°C and a high of

29°C. There has been no rainfall this month and the bush is very dry.

**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** – Bird of prey sightings continue to be good. The first African



Crowned eagle to be seen on Pidwa was recorded this month and there has been plenty of vulture activity. A kudu male died of old age in the buffalo camp and his carcass was placed on Eland loop. Over 30 white backed vultures and a few Lappet faced vultures were seen feeding on it. Many vultures have also been seen drinking from the

concrete pan on the airstrip.

**Identification kits & Reserve records** – This month bumping into lionesses Zingela & Tumblela on Ranch Dam wall provided a great opportunity for photos and hence for their ID kits to be updated. A new kit has also been made for a young male leopard seen regularly in the buffalo camp.

## Sightings & Other news

**Cheetah** – We haven't seen Busayo & Makwavo as much this month. They were spotted on the northern side of the Selati river on the 24<sup>th</sup> July and found the next day with a juvenile zebra kill. It appears to be one of the new releases from the buffalo camp that they chased into the fence.

**Lions** – As mentioned it is suspected that Umfokazi, the Askari pride male, paid



a visit to the sleep out spot on Duiker road and Zingela and Tumblela were seen taking in some morning sun on Ranch Dam wall. 2 lions were seen with a wildebeest kill on the eastern buffalo camp fence but it was not possible to confirm who they were. The Askari pride females with the 6 cubs were seen just once this month on Flakythorn and

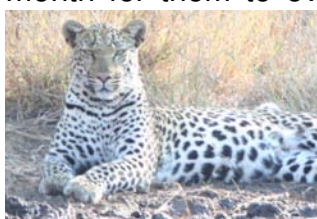
Umfokazi was also with them. The oldest 4 cubs have grown considerably, with 1 even starting to show a mane.

**Rhino** – Isinkwe and Nembela have been seen a few times this month as well as the other slightly older male we see using the area around Bushbaby and Ranch Dam. In the buffalo camp the female with the sub-adult female calf was seen twice and the female with new baby has also been seen twice. This always

seems to be around Sicklebush and the newly pumped pan by Double gate named Leopard pan.

**Elephants** - There continues to be plenty of elephant sightings on Pidwa north during the winter months. A mixture of bulls and breeding herds have been seen and often in the same areas. Double gate road, Boerbean and Appleleaf are popular as well as the area around the Selati river banks. On numerous occasions herds have been seen drinking from the concrete pan on the airstrip and elephants have also been seen using the newly pumped pan on Eland loop to bath and drink.

**Leopard** – For the first time there have been enough leopard sightings this month for them to even have a section of their own! The large male who has been seen previously at Hide Dam in the buffalo camp was there once again this month. All other sightings were provided by a smaller, younger male who seems to frequent the north of the camp. He was seen on 4 separate occasions lying at the pan near Double gate. He seems very unbothered by vehicles and on a few occasions has provided great sightings just lying for hours, relaxed in the sunshine. He has therefore been named “Nghwazi” meaning ‘Bold’ in Tsonga.



- There has been a new nyala birth this month in the top breeding camp.
- Two honey badgers were seen together foraging on Granite road and a civet was seen in Pidwa south.
- An old male kudu died in the Buffalo camp most likely due to starvation in the dry winter months
- Tracks of a very young baby rhino have been seen just outside the buffalo camp in the open system. We rarely see female rhinos in the open system so as yet are not too sure who the mother is.
- The cheetah conservation group DeWildt visited Pidwa this month to confirm the purchase of 4 new cheetah. A coalition of 3 young males and 1 young female will arrive as soon as a holding boma has been built for them on Langa langa.

## ‘Lion’ Watch



This month Leon proved once again that maybe the pimp slippers and himself have many lives! On a cold July evening whilst trying to warm up by the fire the pimp slippers found themselves actually in the fire! But not just that, Lion’s feet were inside. The worrying thing is, he didn’t realise until everyone else told him his shoes, and nearly his feet, were on fire!