

ASKARI NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2008

Overview



After the rhino adventure of May, June has seemed a calmer month but there has still been plenty going on. From reedbuck births and leopard sightings to a huge increase in the number of elephants on Pidwa! Read on to find out what the Askari team have been up to this month.

Events on Pidwa

Last month we reported on the escape of male rhino Isikhumba from the buffalo camp into the main reserve. Although returned he was not a happy man for the 1st few weeks. He did not leave the eastern fenceline of the camp even to drink or feed. This obviously caused concern and so supplementary food and water was put out for him each day on the fenceline. Luckily his tracks have now been seen away from the fence and around water holes in the camp. We hope he is finally settling down to the idea of being back home again.

During a routine Nyala and Reedbuck count a new baby reedbuck was spotted in the bottom camp. This is very exciting news and for the first time, all of the reedbuck were seen running together. It allowed us to confirm there are definitely 6 individuals (2 of which are new-borns). This is an amazing success story. No-one really even knows which ratios of male to female reedbuck should be kept for successful captive breeding or even what habitat and food should be provided. It seems that



Pidwa have it spot on though with 3 having been born since their introduction to the breeding camp.

Reserve work

Road-clearing continued this month on the roads of Nyala and Tshukudu. Nyala is now clear of all over-hanging branches whereas Tshukudu still has plenty of work to go. Magnolia, the Natal mahogany, is doing well from weekly waterings which are important now with the bush being so dry.

A project started this month to re-store the hide at Hide Dam in the buffalo camp. The old, broken steps have been removed and new ones made and varnished. Painting of the hide has started with carbolineum. This is like a wood

sealant/varnish which prevents erosion, termite activity etc. We hope the painting will be completed and the steps put in place next month.

An anti-poaching patrol was carried out in the buffalo camp. This was through an area where 60 snares, a butchery and poachers camp was found earlier this year. We were looking for any fresh signs of poacher activity (tracks, new snares etc). Thankfully there was no evidence of poacher presence however 5 old snares were removed from the area along with other wire and debris.

Sleep out took place in a new spot on Jackal plains, on the northern side of the Selati river. There were plenty of animals in the vicinity as throughout the night we heard jackal, spotted hyena and 3 different sets of lions.

There were a few different reserve clean-up projects this month. Firstly, the feeding crush on central cutline was removed. Unfortunately all the bolts and nuts were rusted firmly in place so a generator and grinder were taken down to the site. Once cut into smaller pieces all the metal was loaded onto the vehicle and taken back to HQ. Corrugated iron and other pieces of metal were also removed from next to Ratel pan.

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, lion, cheetah and elephant have all been seen as well as Serval.

Monitoring projects

Weather monitoring - June has recorded the coldest temperature this year. A low of 9°C showed up on the thermometer and a high of 25°C. On the 18th and 19th June we had a few freak spots of rain overnight but not enough to register on the gauge.

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 continue collecting information for animal ID kits.

Birds of Prey – Bird of prey sightings continue to be good. Many Dark chanting goshawks were seen this month as well as a few Bateleurs. Numerous eagle species have been spotted including Tawny, Martial and Wahlbergs.



Identification kits & Reserve records – This month a good sighting of the 2 sub-adult lions Masana & Mumu provided a great opportunity for photos and hence for their ID kits to be updated.

Sightings

Cheetah – Busayo & Makwavo have been seen very often again this month. One day they were relaxing on the termite mound on main access. On other occasions they were seen on the northern fenceline that borders Langa langa and also on Buffalo cutline and Boma road. We have not seen the female with cubs this month but have had reports from game drives on the Makalali that they have been seen a few times on Pidwa north.



Lions – The Askari pride have been seen in their usual spots this month, twice on the airstrip and twice on Eland loop. On one occasion on the airstrip they were joined by Umfokazi, the pride male, and were seen drinking from the small concrete pan. Masana and Mumu were living up to their names meaning ‘sun’ and ‘sun-rays’ this month. They were seen in the heat of the day drinking at Cutline dam before setting off for a long walk south down Marula cutline.



Rhino – After last month this has been a bit of a quiet rhino month! A bull was seen on Bushbaby as well as the 2 usual suspects Isinkwe and Nembelela. Whilst on a research route in Pidwa south a female rhino was seen with a female calf estimated to be between 1 and 2 years old.

Elephants



Now that the reserve is much drier we have seen a lot of elephant activity. On 2 occasions single bulls have been seen but we have also been seeing breeding herds. One herd of 9 was seen feeding close to Cutline dam and a herd of 20 were seen coming in for an evening drink at Lily pan. This herd have been using the area a lot since and have even crossed onto the northern side of the Selati river to Jackal plains and beyond.

Other – An extremely large honey badger was seen this month on Marula cutline. A serval was also seen during one of the research drives on Darter road near the river. It has been confirmed that there is a new baby reedbuck in the bottom camp. That takes the total up to 6, 1 adult male, 2 adult females, 1 sub-adult female and 2 juveniles. Whilst having our wilderness lecture on the koppie of Langa langa a male leopard was heard calling close by. There were also reports of a male leopard having been seen on Grysbok road by game drive rangers.

