

ASKARI NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2008

Overview



Pidwa has made the most amazing transformation this month to a sea of lush green grasses, bushes and trees. The real summer rains have finally arrived, sometimes in the form of huge, impressive electrical storms. The 1st impala lamb has been spotted and the migrant birds have arrived. Insects fill the air with flight and song and reptile sightings are plentiful. Night drive this month was without a doubt unbeatable

due to the amazing sight of a pangolin! The cheetah boma was completed, roads needed repair and creation of a new pan in the Askari garden has started. Read on to find out more about all this and what else the Askari team have been up to this month.....oh, did I mention the Pangolin?!

Events on Pidwa

The cheetah boma on Langa langa has been completed this month after many varied work sessions. There were plenty of cut branches to drag out of the area and the newly fixed dams got a new lick of paint. Stumps have been ripped out or choppered and the internal road system has been finalised. The fence lines have been cleared and bulldozed and we now just await the arrival of the fence team to move in which will be early next month.



Work on a new project has started to create a pan in the Askari garden; with the hope of attracting amphibians, reptiles and even nesting birds. Earth has been removed and used to form a dam wall and an island created in the middle where fever trees have been planted. A pipe has been put in to run from the borehole to the pan and the earth compacted. We hope it will be finished next month and we'll keep you

posted with news of what beasties we attract to the garden.

Sad farewells to some of our volunteers meant the formation of a new group for November, "The World Wildcat Association & Co."

Reserve work

Road-clearing took place this month on Hartebeest road in the Buffalo camp and 4 new saplings were planted at the hide. 3 Snuff box trees, “The Matterhorn”, “N-seek” and “Van Pupstein”, were placed in front of the hide and a Weeping boerbean named “Pete” just to the side. In the meantime, “Magnolia”, “Puppert”, “In memorial” and “Jack Russel” don’t know what to do with themselves with all this rain. They are all going great guns and sprouting new shoots all over the place. Taking advantage of the soil being so soft, 4 Weeping boerbeans and 4 Natal Mahogany trees were also planted on Jackalberry plains in November.



3 reserve clean up sessions took place this month. These were all on the northern plains where a previous farmer had decided to dump all his rubbish. Old fences, metal, tyres and plastics were pulled out as well as an old cattle crush which was cut with the grinder before being hauled out the hole.

Sleep out this month took place at Ranch Dam. It has become quite the action spot with the 2 male rhinos Isinkwe & Nembelela visiting us just after dark. The calls of a male lion could be heard throughout the night and drawing closer and closer. At 3am, Umfokazi put in his appearance on the dam wall. He strolled across, vocalising as he went and then disappeared as quickly as he arrived to continue his patrol for the night.

Game counts took place in the nyala camps this month and we are pleased to report 2 new nyala births in the top camp. The sable are now fully settled in and even very inquisitive of us humans when we go in to feed or clean. Askari continue to assist Christof with feeding and both water and feeding bays were cleaned out this month.

Askari continued to assist reserve management with the feeding of eland in the buffalo camp. Once the rain arrived however we were no longer greeted by the sight of 24 odd eland waiting for us as we drove in. The decision was made on the 12th to stop feeding as they appear to have now found food in the bush themselves.



And incase you’re wondering, that even includes Clicky! Not even he wants to know us anymore now the rains have bought the real food back!

Alien plants were treated this month on the northern plains, Nyala river road and in the block behind HQ. It’s also the time of year to start treatment of Lantana so a stand of this was cut down and choppered on Main access.

Work at the common false thorns has been completed and now both Common false thorns can sleep tight at night knowing the elephants can't reach their bark. Thanks to all the teams that made this happen, new trees will be selected for protection in the new year.



Anti-poaching patrols have continued at a regular pace since the discovery of snares in the buffalo camp last month. A further 56 have been recovered during November bringing the total to 192. A snare rack has also been made of old leadwood posts and erected in the Askari garden. All snares can hang on the rack to remind us of what we've achieved but also what we will continue to fight against. The recovery of

such a large number of snares just re-iterates the need for extra eyes and ears out there on the reserve so again, a huge thank you to everyone for their time at Askari and help in the battle against poachers.

The rains have brought with them some problems for the roads. Where ruts have formed in previous years, the road becomes flooded and boggy very quickly causing problems for vehicles and fence patrols. The Askari team have been collecting gravel and moving it to the worst hit areas to try and prevent vehicles becoming stuck and further damage to the roads.

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 cheetah, elephant, side striped jackal and rhino were seen.

Monitoring projects

Weather monitoring – Rain, rain and more rain has been the story for November but we can't complain, it's great for the bush. We have had a total of 138mm rainfall and a whopping top temperature of 43°C. Our minimum has been 15°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 – Vultures provided a great sighting this month when 37 of them were seen flying, feeding and fighting over a kudu carcass on the airstrip. Plenty of other birds of prey were spotted including Dark chanting goshawk, Lizard buzzards, Brown snake eagles and a Wahlberg's eagle fighting with a pair of Spotted eagle owls.

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

Nocturnal mammal survey – PANGOLIN! The mythical creature that many of us don't really believe exists and the one we always dream of seeing but doubt we ever will. Well.....I can assure you, it DOES exist and it's here on Pidwa.



The Askari team could not believe their luck this month when only half an hour into nocturnal drive, nothing less than a pangolin wandered out onto the road. Not only that but he (I say 'he' as it was absolutely huge, about a metre in length if not more) was very relaxed and just sat in the grass allowing us to take photos of him. His head and eyes were surprisingly small and we were lucky enough to stay

with him for about 15 minutes before he wandered back out onto the road, along it for a while and then back into the bush to continue the search for ants. We were ready to pack up and go home after that but the northern plains had more treats in store. Literally 2 minutes later we bumped into the Askari pride cubs, stalking through the bush. More cats were on offer with the sight of an African Wildcat a few minutes later and to top the evening off a White tailed mongoose was seen strolling around. Could you ask for a better night drive than that? We, "The pangolin gang", don't think you can!

Sightings & Other news

Cheetah – Busayo & Makwavo were seen twice this month. Once relaxing on the Harmony cutline and one morning on Leadwood drive.

Lions – Once again it's the Askari pride who have provided all the lion sightings



this month. At the start of the month the females and cubs were at Ranch dam and, as mentioned earlier, Umfokazi paid a visit there during sleep out. We also spotted the whole pride hunting impala from on top of the Langa koppie

this month. Whilst enjoying sundowners after an anti-poaching patrol the alarm calls of impala could be heard. Sure enough we could see the pride between the trees close to the northern fence line that borders Langa langa. A few members of the pride were also seen crossing Jackalberry plains heading for the river and the cubs were out and about on the northern side on the evening of our night drive.

Rhino – As always we have had good sightings of rhino in the buffalo camp although they are definitely fewer and further between since the halting of lucerne. I know there's some of you that won't believe this but we bumped into Isikhuma (aka Large Alan) the other day and he didn't want a sniff of us! Without those green squares on our truck he couldn't care less and strolled off as soon as we spotted him! A new group of rhino to the Askari team have been spotted in the open system which is a female with a calf approximately 1 and a half years old and a young male of about 4 years. The 3 usual suspects, Isinkwe, Nembelela and 'male number 3' have also been seen.

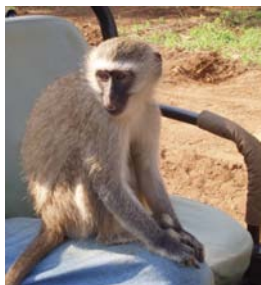


Elephants - Elephants were seen just twice this month. A breeding herd was spotted near Aardvark and Flakythorn as well as a group of 5 males with a female close to the Gravelotte fence line.

Leopard – A large male leopard was seen in the buffalo camp this month breaking a dry leopard spell of a few months. On our way to road clearing he was seen sitting next to a newly, rain created, pan on Hartebeest road. He stayed around long enough for a few snaps before walking off into the bushes. His fresh tracks have been seen since on that same road when we have returned to road clear again.

- The Askari team made a little road trip this month to see if the grass was any greener, during this time of drought, on the other side. We packed our lunches and departed for Makalali in the morning. Although we achieved our aim of seeing hippo and crocodile, the grass was most certainly not greener and we saw about 1 impala, 1 warthog and 15 zebra. It was a relief to get back on the home soil of Pidwa after such an un-eventful day!

Monkey Business



Askari have inherited a new team member this month in the form of a young Vervet monkey! During a session at the cheetah boma on Langa the team came across Colin, a young male, who was all on his own and came out of the bushes to say hello. Within just a few minutes he was accepting pieces of grass from us and grooming Joe! When

we went to leave, Colin hopped on and came along for the ride and we haven't been able to get rid of him since!

Not that we'd want to, I mean how much trouble can a little monkey be.....let's just say it's been a learning curve for us all. We suspect that Colin was hand-reared as without a doubt, he knows humans. But where he's come from and how he ended up on Langa langa, we have no idea. There are some strict rules in place, no entry to buildings and definitely no feeding from human hands. In fact he doesn't need any feeding at all. He is very independent and quite the efficient insect hunter. He spends a lot of his day foraging for food, another portion grooming himself and the rest looking for cuddles! Although scared at first he is getting used to being left outside alone to sleep at night and although I'm not sure he'll ever be "well" behaved, he's definitely improving. He seems to think I'm his mum and never wants to be too far away. He joins us on every activity whether it be game drive or rock packing and entertains himself in the bush while we do all the hard work. For all his mischievous ways, he's just doing what monkeys do and he's great fun to have around. It's a great way to learn about their behaviour as well and he does a lot of talking so if we ever work out what he's saying we'll let you know! For now, here are a few snaps of Colin grooming and Colin on game drive!



Lastly from myself and Joe and everyone at Pidwa we'd like to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and we'll see you again in the New year!



