

ASKARI NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2008

Overview



have been up to this month.

September and the summer is really hotting up. We are still waiting desperately for the long needed rain and unfortunately there are still plenty of animals, especially kudu and nyala, suffering from the drought. Luckily though, on the plus side we have plenty of exciting projects to keep us busy including preparing the boma for arrival of our new cheetah males. Read on to find out what the Askari team

Events on Pidwa

This month the large job of erecting and electrifying the perimeter fence around Langa langa started. This also meant it was time to select and get to work on a site for the cheetah boma. Our coalition of 3 male cheetah will hopefully be arriving anytime from the end of October and there are certain requirements from the cheetah conservation group DeWildt, who are providing us with the cheetah, for their initial holding boma. The boma will be 1 hectare in size and the site chosen on Langa langa already has the electricity supply necessary for the fence of the boma and also water troughs. With the fence between Pidwa north and Langa langa still being in place it provides the perfect set-up for introduction of the new cheetah. After 2 to 3 months in the holding boma they will be released onto Langa langa itself. Here they will have a chance to establish their own territory and get to know the place without the worry of lions and other cheetah (namely the existing male coalition Busayo & Makwavo). The 3 males are still young, just over 2 years old, and so far in life have not had interaction with lions. It is therefore important to give them some exposure to lions before they are released fully into the open system. This will occur via the fence between Langa langa and Pidwa north and give the new arrivals a chance to wise up to their more dominant predator neighbours before that fence is finally dropped a few months later.

There was also the arrival of a new group of volunteers this month; Stingray, Steve & Paul.....don't ask! They underwent their training before heading out to work on the reserve.

Reserve work



Road-clearing was completed on Sicklebush road in the buffalo camp this month. For those of you who know the dreaded sicklebush there was plenty of that, along with many raisin species to be removed. Despite the terribly dry conditions Magnolia, the Natal mahogany continues to surprise us by producing almost a new sprout daily! Go Magnolia!

Reserve clean up sessions took place close to Askari house this month. Old, metal pipes were removed from Eland loop and old, blue, plastic pipes taken out of Combretum road and the Main Access road.

Sleep out this month took place in a new spot close to Ranch Dam. On arrival, we were greeted by white rhino male number 3 (he still needs his proper name!)



and the Askari pride on a kill. Mums took a back seat while the 6 cubs tucked into and wrestled over an adult female warthog they had killed. But we couldn't sit around all day watching lions so we collected wood, set up camp, started a fire and then sat around all night watching lions! A mere hundred metres away they didn't seem to mind us at all. The wind picked up a little later in the evening and they moved off; probably to find

some shelter and sleep off their warthog dinner.

Game counts took place in the nyala camp this month and sadly a dead baby reedbuck was found in the bottom camp. It is likely that giving birth at such a dry time of year was just too much for the mother to be. Askari have now also completely taken over the feeding of the nyala in the breeding camps. Christof ferries food over to the hungry bunch most days and at the weekends Askari volunteers are responsible for delivering breakfast and dinner. Nyala and reedbuck in the bottom camp were also administered their de-worming medicine this month now the new bull has had some time to settle in.



Alien plants were murdered in large numbers this month. Prickly pears and Queen of the nights were injected on Combretum, Double gate road, Appleleaf, Burchell's loop, Ficus and Aardvark. A sequel to the Fantastic Fours "Mothership" was found and promptly named the "Grandmother ship". Do not fear though, she has been dealt with since and is well on her way to being yellow & shriveled!

Work at the Common false thorns started by the Dead poachers society, continued by the Fantastic four and continued some more by Jekyll & Hyde has now been continued further by Stingray, Steve, Paul. The rock perimeter around the 2nd tree is growing weekly and is almost complete. Try de-barking now elephants.....ha ha!



Rocks were also collected and transported to Klip pan this month where we are having elephant problems of a different kind! There, the elephants are pulling up the pipes from the water pump in an attempt to find fresh water. A bull rhino has also been using the adjacent telegraph pole as his rubbing post. A little inconvenient for us as he keeps getting his horn caught in all the electricity cables and shorting out the power to the lodge when he impatiently tries to untangle himself! We are hoping that a rock perimeter around the fence and pole will ease these 2 problems a little.

Askari continue to assist reserve management in the feeding of eland in the buffalo camp. There has only been 1 eland death this month so the feed appears to be easing the strain and the eland are really becoming used to our presence. It provides a great opportunity for sightings and even to make a few personal friends. One particular male has been named Clicky. He has some real character, including the fact he only has 1 ear and as his name suggests, does a large amount of clicking when strolling around the feed!



Askari also made numerous drives this month to look for lionesses Zingela & Tumblela. These lionesses have been sold to a reserve in Kwa-Zulu-Natal to relieve predator numbers on the Greater Makalali conservancy. Although we found both lionesses one morning there was unfortunately no-one available to dart them so for now they remain on Pidwa.

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, spotted hyena and the lone Gemsbok on Pidwa were seen.

Monitoring projects

Weather monitoring – The heat continues to rise with a top temperature of 38°C being reached a number of times this month. Unfortunately still no sign of the ever needed rain but we will keep hoping and maybe it will arrive next month.

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 the largest number of sightings this month. White backed, Lappet faced, Hooded and Cape were all seen. Other birds of prey spotted included Brown snake eagle, African fish eagle, Bateleur, Gymnogene, Steppe eagle and Tawny eagle.

Identification kits & Reserve records – New ID kits for Makwavo, the cheetah male and WRf2 in the buffalo camp were made this month.

Sightings & Other news



Cheetah – Busayo & Makwavo were seen close to Askari a few times this month on Main access, Combretum and Double gate road. They were also seen on Ficus making a kill and then eating their kudu meal.

Lions – The Askari pride have been seen numerous times this month. Once on the eastern side of the nyala camp and also at Ranch Dam feeding on a warthog. They were seen with a kudu kill on Flakythorn. Kudu and warthog are always preyed upon heavily during times of drought due to their loss in condition increasing their vulnerability to predators.

Zingela & Tumblelela have been seen once together this month and once apart. We suspect that one, if not both of them, may in fact be pregnant. They were seen with the Kalahari male on one of these occasions and the second time, although not with him, they were in the same area as him.

Masana and Mumu were seen relaxing on Shanatzi dam wall during a research drive in Pidwa south.

Rhino – All 5 rhinos in the buffalo camp have been seen on numerous occasions with the feeding of lucerne for the eland. They are often there ready and waiting for food and even lay down in the shade or mud bath in the pan when there's no food around. Outside of the buffalo camp white rhino male number 3 was seen at Klip pan, Ranch dam and on Ficus.



Elephants - September has been a bit of a quieter elephant month. A breeding herd was seen just once on Bushbaby and 3 adult bulls on Eland loop. One lone bull was seen close to the lodge feeding.

- A new nyala has been born in the top breeding camp.
- The one lone Gemsbok on Pidwa was seen twice this month. Once on Flakythorn and once on Marula cutline when it was traveling with a herd of kudu.
- Unfortunately 2 adult female kudu have been found dead this month, one in the open system and one in the buffalo camp. A sub-adult male nyala and sub-adult male kudu were also found dead in the buffalo camp. The drought is really hitting these species hard.



- One adult female eland died in the buffalo camp
- Again a number of kills were seen this month. These include the kudu kill made by Busayo & Makwavo and the kills by the Askari pride, a warthog and a kudu.
- On arrival at the Langa langa koppie for the wilderness lecture a brown hyena was taken by surprise. This is a very rare sighting and it froze for a few seconds on the rock before running off into the bush.
- 2 separate sightings of African wildcat occurred this month close to Askari house. One of these was in broad daylight at 10 o'clock in the morning.