

ASKARI WILDERNESS CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Askarian - April 2017

<http://www.askariwcp.com>

The month in view

Coming up.....

- Fleming college team no.7
- Conservation & Sightings
- Sable & Nyala relocations
- Wild dogs return
- Reserve projects

Volunteers joining Askari this month were the 7th team of Ecosystem management students from Fleming college in Ontario, Canada...."Jayla & the Super 7".

Sable darting

The team spent a fantastic morning with Dr Peter Rogers darting and relocating Sable from the breeding camps out into the wild. In total, 13 animals were moved and it was a successful operation.



Remember to 'Like' the Askari Facebook page to receive daily sightings and project updates to your news feed <http://www.facebook.com/Askari.Wilderness.Conservation.Programme>



The Wild dogs are back in force

Having denned on the southern section of the reserve, the wild dog pack spent the majority of their time there as the puppies grew. Now, as they get older, they are spreading further afield and have returned to Pidwa north for a much longer period this month. The team was lucky enough to have a few sightings of the 7 animals that now form the pack. With one adult lost and quite a few of the puppies they are now down to 3 adults with 4 youngsters. It is not unusual for them to lose so many which is one of the reasons they have many puppies to start with.

It is always a pleasure to see the dogs and amazing to watch the interactions between members. The original 4 were a 'break-away' pack from the Phalaborwa area of Kruger National Park. It is near impossible to fence a wild dog in so they do move around readily. Not only do they cross fences with ease but they roam over huge ranges which often surpass the area available on one reserve. In the pack, only the alpha male and female dogs mate so subordinates must break off and form their own packs to have the same chance.

Sadly, during their time spent roaming, wild dogs come across many threats ranging from roads and farmers to other predators. It's great that for now, this pack are sticking with the protection of the reserve.



Reserve work & Projects

Tree protection was updated for a large Knobthorn tree close to the Nyala shed....an area hard hit by elephant damage. The rocks protect the tree from being pushed over but also from the removal of bark which, in large quantities, can be fatal.

Common thorn apple **alien plants** were removed from huge stands on our new Pidwa East section. These originate in South America and don't belong in Africa. They reproduce via a thorny, apple-like seed so even after removal need to be burnt to prevent further spread.



A whole day was spent **darting and relocating Nyala** antelope this month too. Males were switched between camps to vary genetics and a new breeding herd was also created by joining young females together.



Benthic invertebrate surveys were completed across 2 transects of the Selati River. By collecting and identifying samples we are able to assess the health of our water system. This is a long-term project that relies on the analysis of species diversity and abundance over time.



Erosion control and Gabions

As per the ethos of Pidwa, reserve management is about so much more than just the animals. Much as we all love to see them, protecting their habitat is more helpful than anything else. The bush is a complex ecosystem where one organism forms an intricate web with many others around it. Without the herbivores there are no predators and without vegetation there are no herbivores.....without the soil, there is no vegetation! That's why we were hard at work this month to recover and fix a badly eroded area on the northern plains. As well as helping dramatically with our road maintenance, the fixing of this area will prevent the further erosion of soil and loss of habitat.



In these extreme cases, man-made gabions are used. These are created by building a metal cage which is then filled with rocks. A special geo-mesh netting is placed between layers of cages to help trap seeds and assist in the re-establishment of vegetation over the area. The team spent 2 full mornings at the site, building cages, collecting rocks, digging, sewing wire and fitting everything in place. The result is a strong base for new growth to stabilise future soils.

Wildlife monitoring, Conservation & Sightings

In just a short time with the Fleming team we had some of our best sightings of 2017. I have to start with a special mention to the multi-species shot featured on page 1. I'm always on the lookout for the most interesting combination of species in a photo but **lion** and **brown hyaena** was never one I thought I would get!

On a morning route drive in Pidwa South we were already so excited to come across a pride of 5 lions. As they strolled past the vehicle and down the road, we followed them as they turned the corner. I think they were just as surprised as we were to suddenly see a brown hyaena a little further on! Surprisingly, the hyaena didn't run immediately. It stood for a few seconds, taking in the scene. Lifted it's leg for a small toilet relief then turned and made a slow trot off into the bush. A simply stunning sight for the team.



We enjoyed a sighting of male lions 'Zamula' & 'Kalahari jnr', **elephant**, **spotted hyaenas** and **cheetah** and even a glimpse of the ever elusive **leopard** which had recently killed an impala in the drainage line.

