



ASKARI WILDERNESS CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Askarian – January 2024

The month in view

<http://www.askariwcp.com>



Coming up.....

- Sighting of the month
- Cheetah, mongoose and eagle-owl release
- Cheetah monitoring
- Conservation projects
- Reserve work

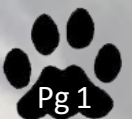
Joining us in January was our 4th Semester abroad team from Fleming college, Ontario, Canada. Our select team of 9 'Ecosystem management' students are completing their 3 month winter semester while also helping with all the projects and happenings at Askari. The "Mother Mounds" chose their name as a homage to the enormous termite mound situated on the Askari driveway.

Sighting of the month

It is not often you get to see young lions playing in the afternoon sunset. The Askari pride includes three adult lionesses and seven sub-adults, of which six are males. The team was lucky enough to observe the youngsters playing in a puddle in the afternoon setting light. These boys gave us quite a show!



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>



Cheetah release



After some time in the Langa boma it was time for the males to make their exit to the wild! An impala carcass was used to lure them out at the start of the month, and we then used telemetry to track their movements in the following weeks. They made a great start and on their 4th day of freedom were found with a

Kudu kill! We were concerned a week later to find Mojo alone with no sign of Max nearby. Amazingly, 2 days later the boys were reunited, at the exact same time that we were standing there with Mojo! A special moment to witness. Once back together, the boys started venturing and unfortunately, with the fences down due to the flooded river, they crossed over into Pidwa north!

Banded mongoose release

Moholoholo, a local rehabilitation centre required a safe place to release a small business of banded mongoose they recently acquired. Pidwa was the perfect spot so the team helped construct a temporary boma, deep within the reserve to prepare them for release. The boma creates a soft release scenario, helping the mongoose familiarise with their surroundings, before letting them go.



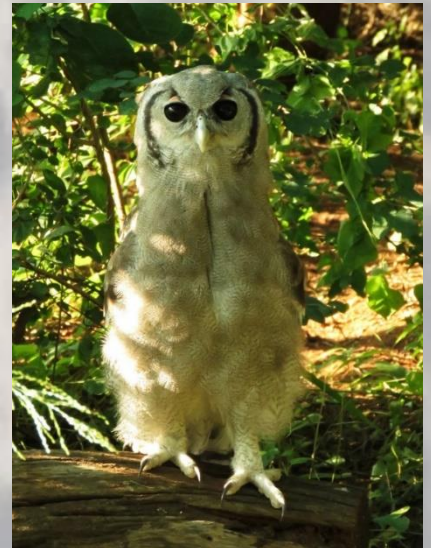
Banded mongoose release continued.....

The team carried out daily check and feeding of the mongoose, until their release. After a successful 2 weeks in the boma, they were released to the joy of everyone involved. They scurried off, investigated their surroundings and gave us a show of them in digging action! The business also found an African giant land snail and proceeded to try eat it. However, these snails have a thick shell and much to the disappointment of the mongoose's, they were left defeated. After a while, they got braver and successfully ventured off into the bush. Success!



Verreaux's eagle owl release

Moholoholo additionally asked the team to release a, once injured, Verreaux's eagle owl. These owls can stand up to 66 cm tall and are the largest owls in Africa. They are quite special to see up close. The team made daily checks and fed the owl at night, until its release from the camp boma, a couple of weeks later. This beauty flew off in a heartbeat and you could feel the joy in seeing it fly off with such silent grace!



Cheetah monitoring

Late last year we released a 2-year-old female cheetah named 'Siya' onto the reserve. Throughout the month the team, along with Assistant manager Andrew, monitored her daily movements and checked on her progress. With very little of her own hunting she required regular supplementary feeding throughout the month.



Conservation projects

As the Fleming college team are completing their 'Ecosystem Management' semester, they took on a few reserve conservation projects working closely with Askari staff and Andrew. One project was working on different control methods of encroaching (but indigenous) variable bushwillow. This tree can remain as a shrub with multiple stems extending from the base and, if left unattended, encroaches and takes over. The team worked on various methods that can be used to eradicate the plant from one of the buffalo bomas. Additional projects included the monitoring of cheetah and buffalo movements. Using data from the LoRa collars, buffalo herd movements post-release were studied as well as the development of a heat map for the coverage of the LoRa gateways across the reserve.



Reserve work-roads and invasive plants

This month the team helped with various projects on the reserve, first up the task of road maintenance. Due to erosion from floods, the integrity of the roads are compromised. The team helped fix these holes by filling them with layers of sand and rocks, until it can be safely driven over once more.



The removal of invasive alien plants such as Prickly pear and Lantana are ongoing conservation jobs on the reserve. However, there is a notable decline of these species, thanks to all who have partaken in this activity in the past and present! Each plant species requires different methods to eradicate. Poison is injected straight into the cactus leaves of the prickly pear, where lantana requires chopping the stems down as low as possible for the poison to then be painted directly onto the exposed stumps.

