



ASKARI WILDERNESS CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Askarian - August 2014

<http://www.askariwcp.com>

The Month in view



Coming up.....

- Elephant darting
- Owl special
- This month's sightings
- Reserve projects
- Sad farewells & new arrivals

Volunteers joining Askari this month formed "The Southern white tits". Volunteers were from Australia, Canada, England, France, Portugal and The Netherlands.

Owls

This month we enjoyed a fantastic array of the many owl species that call Pidwa home. This included regular sightings of the Verreaux's eagle-owl pair who are nesting near the end of the Askari driveway. Also the first ever Southern white-faced scops owl spotted by the team!



Top left, clockwise to bottom left: Southern white-faced scops owl, Pearl-spotted owlet, African barred owlet, Verreaux's eagle-owl, Spotted eagle-owl, Barn owl.



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 grass is always greener on the other side

Pidwa is fenced around its entire perimeter with a 2.3 metre high electrical fence. In most places the live wires carry a voltage of at least 6000 volts. Our fences have a couple of purposes, one to keep people out and another to keep animals in! Well this month, the animals were determined to prove the fencing insufficient when both an elephant and lioness ended up crossing/breaking the fence to check if the grass really *was* greener on the other side.



Our first animal that popped up in the wrong place was an elephant....he was a visitor from our neighbours on the reserve next door! The bull had broken through two fences to reach the plains of Pidwa in a bid, we believe, to meet some new ladies! Well unfortunately he was not able to stay so our normal plans were postponed for a couple of days while we helped search for the visitor. Once located, the helicopter and vet were called in. The male was darted and loaded onto a truck, then driven back to where he came from! Always a great experience to be up close and personal with such a giant beast.



Next spotted were some lion tracks on Langa langa, a smaller section of the reserve where lions are supposed to be absent! It wasn't long before the perpetrator was found, one of the lionesses from the Askari pride who had somehow made her way across the internal fence. Luckily she was already close by to the gate and with the sweet smell of an impala carcass and a some vehicles parked in her way, we were able to persuade her to cross back to the open system.



Reserve work & Projects



The team carried out some great **Road maintenance** this month, repairing damage caused by the rains back in March. Huge gullies were created which need fixing up before we receive the next rains. The bulk of the hole is filled with small rocks collected from the river. Gravel is collected next and used to fill in all the gaps.



Fence maintenance took place as we continue to paint fence posts protecting them from rust and termite damage. It is also a great time of year to spot the **alien** 'Prickly pear' **plants** which are killed with an injection of MSMA herbicide into their succulent stem.



Sleep out was stunning under a clear night sky. **Tree protection** was continued in the area surrounding the nyala shed which has taken a hit recently from the visiting elephant herds.



During an **anti-poaching** patrol this month it seemed like we were hot on the trail of a leopard with fresh tracks being seen! The rare **antelope breeding camps** received their monthly **clean** around the feeding bays and water troughs.



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Wildlife monitoring, Conservation & Sightings



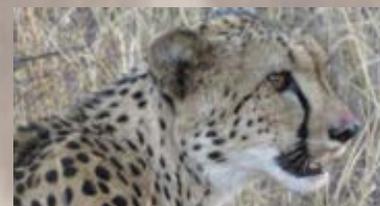
We started the month with a fantastic sighting of female **cheetah** 'Naledi'. She had killed an impala close to the sable breeding camps and allowed us to watch as she devoured her meal. There were a couple more sightings during the month including a great moment where she tried to cross the river without getting her feet wet. Check out the video by following this link – the facial expressions are priceless!

<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=770064979703933&set=vb.220393761337727&type=3&theater>

There were **elephant** sightings to be enjoyed as we bumped into a number of the breeding herds.



On a trip to the Langa koppie a pair of **Kilpspringer** was spotted. Although we had always suspected they were there, this was the 1st time they had ever been seen!



The buffalo had a rude welcome when the **lions** discovered them this month! We left the house to find the local male coalition 'Tembe' and 'Gwala' on our driveway, eyeing up potential breakfast on the other side of the fence! They certainly didn't seem to expect what came next however when the buffalo lined up and charged them. Both lions scattered into the bushes, a little perplexed by the fact that their prey had just chased them.....surely that should be the other way around?!



Also enjoyed were a few more sightings of those little **spotted hyaena** cubs.



Enjoy wildlife video action on the Askari You Tube channel. To join us in the sightings, simply follow <http://www.youtube.com/user/AskariWCP>



Staff farewells & arrivals

This month we said a very sad farewell to our longest standing staff member, Joe. Joe was with Askari from the very start, even before day 1 when the house was still a shell without a volunteer in sight. It was always our dream that Askari was the start of something special. We envisaged a future full of volunteers who believed in the importance of our wilderness, just as much as we did. Well this November, Askari will be 7 years old and when we look back to 2007, Joe was one of the staff welcoming just 2 volunteers as the first ever Askarians. Today, as I write this, the Askari house is buzzing. It is full with volunteers who have come from around the globe. From different backgrounds and with varied future goals, there is one thing they all have in common; a passion for wildlife and the desire to make a difference. After 7 years with the Askari and Pidwa team Joe has moved onto his next adventure, having been an integral part of the success that Askari is today and leaving behind a fantastic legacy. Many of you spent your time at Askari alongside Joe, no doubt enthralled by his wealth of knowledge and infectious passion for the bush. We wish Joe all the best with the future and thank him for his dedicated commitment to Askari over the past 7 years.



Although sad to lose Joe, it is an exciting time to introduce our new Askari staff member Edward. Ed arrived on Pidwa in January this year to complete the practical part of his Nature Conservation studies. Starting as a member of the reserve management team, Ed was quickly snapped up to join the Askari staff when the position opened up. It was evident from his fun-loving personality and passion for the bush that he would be perfect in the role of teaching; and sharing his love for nature and Africa with others. Birds and honey badgers are his passion and he has already converted a number of Askarians to 'twitchers' and installed in them a new found love of birds. And watch out world if you are on the vehicle with him when you spot that badger!

