



ASKARI WILDERNESS CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Askarian - January 2014

<http://www.askariwcp.com>

The Month in view



Coming up.....

- New look newsletter!
- New lion cubs
- Female cheetah in the area
- New hornbill species
- Sable breeding success
- New born elephant
- Reserve project news
- “The Bachelor boys”

Volunteers joining Askari this month formed “The Bachelor boys”. Volunteers were from England, Germany and Malaysia.

The view from the classroom during the Askari wilderness lecture must be one of the best classroom views in the world! This month it included the teams first elephant sighting of their stay as 2 bulls ambled across the plains below. Leaving the koppie, we headed for the plains in the hopes of a closer encounter with the pair. To our surprise it wasn't an elephant we found but a lioness! We followed her down the road and shortly, she stopped to vocalise. A reply came from a kilometre or so away and so we kept following in the hopes she would lead us to the pride. Indeed she did and we soon spotted a male, and another female. It was then that we also saw 2 tiny heads, popping up from behind the females back. We then enjoyed a very special sighting of the 6 lions in total, including the 2 tiny new cubs. From their size, we estimate them to be around 8 weeks old, born somewhere in late November. Early indications suggest they belong to one of the older Askari females and are the first new cubs for the pride in 4 years. In the coming weeks we will



hope to find them again. At this stage, it is a very risky time for the cubs, especially with the rival male ‘Kalahari junior’ in the area. They will most likely stay well hidden for a few more months to come.



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 mum of the month



The Stalk



The Distraction

Over the Christmas holidays a female cheetah and cub were seen around the Askari area on 2 different occasions. It was exciting news for the team to return to as we looked forward to our first sighting and the chance to identify the pair. We didn't have to wait long.....The first sighting was just a quick glimpse at the end of the driveway. Next however was a full blown hunt and kill made right in front of the Askari game viewer! By this stage we had identified the female as 'Naledi', a female who roams to the Pidwa north area on occasion. She was originally reported with 4 cubs but just one remains, a little male around 10 months old. It took Naledi around 10 minutes to stalk across the open grassland of Jackalberry plains. She then crossed the road and sat in the bushes just to the right of the vehicle. A herd of impala, as well as a few waterbuck and a wildebeest were busy grazing on the other side. Next it was the turn of the cub to make his contribution. He dashed across the road and into the herd of impala; as they scattered, a young male ran straight into the mouth of Naledi! The gargling sound of the strangulation soon followed as we pulled up alongside her to watch the impala take its last breath. It really is a true honour to witness such an event in the circle of life. It was also my first ever full kill, from stalk to death, in



The final kill



more than 8 years! Later in the month the team enjoyed another sighting of Naledi and her cub. In the beautiful afternoon light, the conditions were perfect for some gorgeous photos of the pair.



Reserve work & Projects



As usual there were plenty of reserve projects taking place throughout the month. For **Alien plant control**, both 'Prickly pears' (being injected here in the photo) and 'Lantana' plants were treated. Two sessions took place on the site in Langa langa to **rehabilitate eroded soils**. Cutting down sicklebrush trees removes **bush encroachment** and the branches are then used as brush packing over the newly picked and seeded soil to allow new vegetation to grow and prevent animal grazing.

There was plenty of work to be done at the old brown hyaena **boma**. Road clearing took place to thin out the vegetation and fences were skoffled to clear the live wires of vegetation. In the antelope breeding camps tick-off stations needed re-filling and all feeding bays and water troughs were given their monthly clean out. Following the sad loss of a male sable last month, we are happy to report a baby boom for 2014! Since return from the holidays, 4 new sable calves have been seen and are now travelling with the herd.



Displaying hippo!



Wildlife monitoring, Conservation & Sightings



As well as the sighting of the new cubs, we came across more lions later in the month. This is male 'Gwala' who we believe is father to the cubs. All the pride females were seen and we have heard lions vocalising from the house almost every night. One evening after dinner, the roaring was so loud we knew there must be a lion nearby. We dashed over to the fence and got there just in time to see a male standing on the Askari driveway about 70 metres away. Other cat sightings included Naledi and her cub around the Main access and Askari area.

We had heard the news that a new baby elephant was born in December to one of the 3 main herds on the reserve. Throughout January we enjoyed a number of sightings as the herds moved up to the Pidwa north area. Often elephants are very protective of new-born calves but during the couple of sightings we had, all the adults were very relaxed allowing us to enjoy fantastic views of the latest addition.



We have also enjoyed sightings of all the general game including giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, waterbuck, warthog etc. The bush is now very thick, having received plenty of rain over Christmas. It is a plentiful time of year for the herbivores and one they must take advantage of while rearing their young and the next generation. Reserve management were lucky enough to see a honey badger.



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

Exciting new bird arrivals



A new year and a new bird to add to the species list on Pidwa! These charismatic looking birds are 'Trumpeter hornbills'. Up until this year, we only had 4 hornbill species here on the reserve. Those were the southern red billed hornbill, the southern yellow billed hornbill, the African grey hornbill and the rare and elusive southern ground hornbill. Well now we can add one more since a small group (3 is the most that have been seen together) of these Trumpeters have moved in. They visit the fig tree in the Askari garden almost every day and have also been seen along the river while we are out on drive. Their call is very obvious, a loud cry that sounds a bit like a wailing baby. It's so exciting to have them with us. It may just be a seasonal thing but we definitely hope they may be here to stay!



Migratory Birds – January has also seen the return of my personal favourite when it comes to the migratory species. This is a 'European roller' taking the number of roller species now visible on the reserve up to 4.



Staff Arrivals & Farewells

This month we bid a sad farewell to our 'Nature Conservation' student Jimmy who was completing his year long practical with the Reserve management team. Jimmy has moved on to begin his B-tech and we wish him well. In his place 2 students join the team for 2014. Welcome to Kyle and Edward, we look forward to working alongside you with all the exciting projects on Pidwa this year.