

ASKARI WILDERNESS CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Askarian - September 2014

<http://www.askariwcp.com>

The Month in view



Coming up.....

- Prescribed burns
- Beautiful birds
- This month's sightings
- Reserve projects
- Honey badgers

Volunteers joining Askari this month formed "The Jumping Somethings". Volunteers were from Canada, England, Portugal, Scotland and Slovenia.



Here is just a small selection of a few of our bird sightings this month. Bird love has always been compulsory at Askari and with our new, expert birder, staff member Ed on board, the sky's the limit! Each month the team competes in a fiercely contested battle of 'Bird Wars'. Identification by sight is just the beginning.....there are so many calls to recognise as well! Pidwa is home to more than 200 bird species. Test your ID skills and check your answers below!



A



B



C



D

A: African grey hornbill. B: White-backed vulture. C: Brown hooded kingfisher. D: White crested helmet-shrike.



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>



Pidwa burning

Each year we carry out the important management task of controlled burns. Fire is a natural occurrence here in the bush and brings many benefits. These include the burning of moribund which is the dead matter that accumulates on the bush floor year after year. If the moribund layer becomes too thick it prevents new growth coming through. Fire gets rid of this layer at the same time as giving nutrients to the soil to promote new growth. Fire can also be used to remove bush encroachment and alien plant species.



The burns also provided a great few sightings for the team. Firstly, young lioness 'Ibala' was seen mating with one of the Tembe males. Sitting amongst the ash and smoking logs it was quite the romantic setting for the pair! Later that night we drove the entire perimeter of the burnt area to check that everything was put out and there was no risk of the fire jumping. During this drive we saw a serval. This is an exciting sighting in itself but the fact it was in the burnt area meant we had a great, clear view. It seemed to be searching the ground for prey so it was also an unusually long sighting of this elusive, small felid.



Jobs for the Askari team during the fire were to patrol the western boundary of the fire line and ensure the fire didn't jump across to the other side. We also set fire to a number of the internal roads to make sure the full 900 hectares burnt. Then there was patrolling of the boundary to put out any stray logs and flames.



Reserve work & Projects



A project high on the agenda this month was the **removal of old farming fences**. We stumbled across a good few fence lines where barbed wire stretches for hundreds of metres through our wilderness. It's a real team effort to coordinate the removal of the fence, especially as much of the fence has become tangled in the vegetation. Systematically the wire is cut using pliers and bolt cutters before being made into manageable rolls. Posts are also removed where possible.



Other projects included **Fence maintenance** and **alien plant control** – mostly the injection of 'Prickly pear' plants which originate in South America .



Sleep out took place in the river bed this month with lions being heard throughout the night. Rocks were collected from the old mica mine in buffalo camp to continue **tree protection** from elephant damage. **Road maintenance** sessions involved the collection of gravel to fill erosion gullies caused by last years floods. 400 **marula tree seeds** were **planted** to grow new saplings for planting in the bush.



The rare **antelope breeding camps** received their monthly **clean** around the feeding bays and water troughs. Time was also spent re-building the sicklebush walls at the feeding bays to ensure animals pass over the pressure pad tick-sprayer. An **Anti-poaching patrol** took place to look for any signs of poachers or snares. **Road clearing** took place to widen our fire breaks as we approach the main fire season.



Wildlife monitoring, Conservation & Sightings



We had a lovely few sightings of the Askari pride this month, it's amazing to see how big the cubs are getting! An evening at Lily pan saw 9 of the 10 **lions** in the pride relaxing and interacting as the **Verreaux eagle-owls** looked on and the sun set over the horizon! You can see a short video of the action by following this [link](https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=774130679297363&set=vb.220393761337727&type=3&theater)

<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=774130679297363&set=vb.220393761337727&type=3&theater>

We were very lucky with the **honey badgers** this month, with sightings of two different pairs. One was a mother with its youngster and the other was a feisty pair who we saw 'rattling' at a huge kudu male who dared to get too close! We even managed a quick glimpse of a **leopard** this month, not once, but twice in 12 hours! Both visuals were at the aptly named Leopard pan.



Young lioness 'Ibala' was seen doing some early morning maintenance and grooming. Female **cheetah** 'Naledi' was seen and we enjoyed sightings of the **elephant** herds. Nocturnal drives gave sightings of **porcupine**, **genet** and **lesser bushbaby**. **Spotted hyenas** were seen near the den in Pidwa south.

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

