

# ASKARI WILDERNESS CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Askarian – December 2022

<http://www.askariwcp.com>

## The month in view



Coming up.....

- Wild dogs
- Conservation & Sightings
- Amazing hyaenas
- Reserve projects
- Tsessebe darting

“Snow whites & the 7 dwarves” were with us for the first half of December before our Christmas shut-down. Volunteers were from France, Australia and Canada.

## Tsessebe darting



It's always a great experience to join with a wildlife veterinary darting. This month the team assisted with the relocation of a young male tsessebe. He was taken out of the breeding group, where the older, more dominant bull was giving him hassles, and placed in a different area.



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## Wild dog arrival

At the start of the month, 2 African wild dogs were found to be roaming on nearby farmlands, from property to property and in danger of being shot. The management of Makalali reserve, with whom we share our boundary, made the decision to capture the dogs and relocate them to the reserve. There have been past attempts to introduce wild dogs but unfortunately no packs have stayed full-time, the dogs require huge home-ranges and cross fences and move around to suit their needs.



There is a good chance that these dogs won't stay either – especially being 2 males, but it was decided to try in the hopes of saving them from an uncertain future. The Askari team were lucky enough to enjoy a few sightings of the pair as they sussed out their new boundaries up on Pidwa north.



## Amazing hyaena encounter

On an afternoon drive, on route to Pidwa south, we stopped at Cutline dam to view a spotted hyaena. That quickly turned into 3 hyaenas then 4 then 5, until we had counted a total of 9! Finding such a large number together made us wonder and as the smell of death started to fill the air we soon realised there must be a kill nearby. As we looked around for a carcass we were amazed to then see a young hyaena come out of the bushes with the leg of a lion in its mouth!



It's hard to say for sure what happened in this situation. It is very possible that spotted hyaenas killed the lion, that does happen. Also however, the lion may have died from natural causes, or another lion perhaps and then been discovered by the hyaenas. An amazing sighting regardless.



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## Reserve work, Conservation & Sightings

With all the new cubs in the pride, the lions stayed well hidden but we did get a few sightings of the females. There were plenty of summer specials to see including this 'Flap-necked chameleon'.



It has also been another bumper season for Mopane worms. This caterpillar is the predecessor of an emperor moth species and is actually edible. They are collected and harvested for their protein value but in areas where this is not controlled, it has led to unsustainable numbers being removed and local extinction. As their name suggests, they eat mopane tree leaves but they do feed on other tree species too. While some trees can be seen to lose all their leaves after the worms have been through, they grow back completely just a few weeks later, yet another of nature's incredible feats.



## Reserve work

Alien plant control included the removal of Lantana and Prickly pear plants, both from South America. The team also continued work in the sable camps cutting small re-growth after our burning plan. Fence posts were removed from Langa Langa which used to support an old cattle fence. Due to them being so deep underground we mostly used the car to pull them out but then loaded and dropped them off for disposal.



## Merry Christmas from the Askari team

