

ProjectsAbroad™

The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad Conservation Southern Africa

Issue No. III December 2011



Volunteers and staff out in the bush:

Reegan Fraser (Canadian), Victoria Ibbertson (English), staff member Pinki, Patrick Hungerbuehler (Swiss), Simone Petersen (Danish), Project Supervisor Sakaeo, Thibaut Juvet (Swiss), Kasumi Suda (Japanese), Desk Officer Gisela, Melanie Sottocassa (French), Maria Fuchs (German), Maia Wong (French), staff member Jane, Manon Sente (Belgian) and Conservation Manager Kieran

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Editor's Note

Dumela!

Welcome to the final newsletter of the year!

Summer's in full swing, which means the days are scorching (usually between 35 and 40°C), with massive evening thunderstorms and rain. The animals are starting to give birth now that the trees, grasses and other plants they rely on to live have fresh leaves and the summer visitors (the birds) have arrived to escape the harsh winters of the northern hemisphere.



Warthogs cooling down in the mud

In this newsletter, volunteer Reegan Fraser (Canadian, 19, 1 month) compares her experience here in Botswana to her visit through Projects Abroad to Ghana (page 3).

The feature this month on page 5 is about some of those summer visitors mentioned above: the cuckoos.

Find out about our latest mini-project Meat Free Mondays on page 6.

Conservation Manager Kieran Harkin shares the results of the baobab survey, alien plant removal and anti-poaching projects on page 7.

Finally, enjoy the staff and volunteer photos on page 9.



Volunteers at a scenic viewpoint

As 2011 comes to a close, the staff and volunteers at Projects Abroad Kwa Tuli can look back over the last few months with a sense of accomplishment. We've achieved a lot in the way of conservation, and we've proven that our presence in the Tuli Block of Botswana is a positive one. A special thank you goes to all the volunteers who've taken part in the Conservation project in 2011, especially those who worked so hard to make Projects Abroad Kwa Tuli such a great experience. We're all looking forward to a successful 2012 and of course to meeting all the new volunteers in the coming year!

If you have any suggestions or comments, feel free to contact me.
Until next time!

Kaliboga (thank you)

Gisela Madden
Desk Officer and Camp Manager
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From Ghana to Botswana with Projects Abroad

by Reegan Fraser (Canadian, 1 month, 19)

It is difficult to compare the busy streets of Cape Coast, Ghana to the secluded Kwa Tuli Reserve in Botswana. The experiences I have had in each country are incredibly different and it is surprising to even think that they are on the same continent!

In Ghana you fall asleep listening to the sounds of taxis honking, roosters crowing and, in my case, my host mother humming in the kitchen. At Koro Camp in Botswana you fall asleep to the peaceful sound of the bush; birds chirping, the wind blowing on your tent or maybe even an elephant grumbling in the bush surrounding you.



The days plans are just as opposite. My day in Cape Coast would begin in the late morning when I would make my way from my house to the busy main street in the area, while walking past a minimum of ten chickens or goats on my way and stepping over the open sewers beside the roads. Down the road a few minutes I would find myself a taxi, which is never difficult because at any given time you can see as many as 30 taxis on each street, and I would get dropped off at the small village ten minutes out of the city where the orphanage that I worked in was located. After 3 or 4 hours of either playing with the kids outside or helping the teachers at the school, I would catch a taxi back home again.



At Koro Camp we generally wake up at 5:30 am, got ready, made breakfast, and then the group of volunteers and our Field Guide, Sakaeo, began the day usually with some more physical work like dam building or alien plant removal and then go back to camp for a long

Above: Near the busy town centre in Cape Coast, Ghana

Left: Reegan and the youngest class in the school

break where we can nap, have lunch and relax by the pool. In the afternoon we might go on a walk to survey the crocodiles or study the beautiful Baobab trees, and then enjoy a nice supper and game of cards with everyone in the evening.



Each and every day is fascinating and there is so much to learn! I was very surprised by how comfortable life in the bush could be. Koro Camp is like a camping resort with very nice tents, clean drinking water straight from the tap, delicious food and unbelievable scenery. It

completely exceeded my expectations and standards.

Although both experiences in Ghana and Botswana have been incredible and life changing, I must say that there is nothing that compares to the wild Botswana bushveld. Seeing a group of elephants, zebras or any other wildlife here, in their natural habitat, is always exciting and I don't think I would ever get sick of it! I could go on and on about how amazing the animals, the scenery, the sunsets, the people, and even the hard work here is, but it would not do it justice. The real experience will make you love Botswana and the African bushveld!



*Top Left: A giraffe on the way from South Africa to the camp
Above: A beautiful sunset in the Kwa Tuli Reserve
Left: A mama elephant and her very young baby in the Reserve
Below: Reegan fishing in the Limpopo River right in front of her tent*



Feature: Cuckoos



Over the past few weeks, we've been hearing many more birds. The ones with distinctive calls are particularly evident, and these indicate the arrival of the summer visitors who have migrated from the northern hemisphere to southern Africa to escape the winter. Several bird species migrate to Botswana during our summer, including Swallows, Storks and several Raptors. The birds that we've been hearing a lot around Koro Camp, though, are the Cuckoos.

Cuckoos are medium-sized birds with very distinctive calls. They're found in southern

Africa between September and March, after which they return north. Cuckoos are brood parasites, which means that instead of building a nest and laying their eggs in it like most other birds, they lay their eggs in the nests of other birds. This leaves the hard work of feeding and caring for the chick to the host species. The cuckoo chick is often much larger than the host parent and getting the egg into the host nest is no easy task, as birds will defend their nest against cuckoos.

Different Cuckoos parasite different nests; if you were to see a Cuckoo chick being fed by a Sparrow, for instance, you could make an educated guess that the Cuckoo is a Dideric Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx caprius*), as these have a penchant to parasite sparrows, as well as Weavers and Bishops. The Dideric Cuckoo has a distinctive call, with the males calling 'dee-dee-dee-deederik'.

We also hear the African Emerald Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx cupreus*) calling 'pretty Geor-gie', even though this isn't its preferred habitat (it's usually found in valleys and forests); these



parasite Forest Robins, Warblers and Flycatchers.

Probably the most distinctive and incessant call is that of the Red-Breasted Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx solitarius*), who calls 'quid-pro-quo' or 'Piet-my-vrou' in Afrikaans, over and over again, sometimes well into the night; this Cuckoo parasites mostly Robins. Although these Cuckoos aren't necessarily shy, they are elusive. They spend their time high in the tree tops, and with their mottled green plumage, they're very difficult to see.

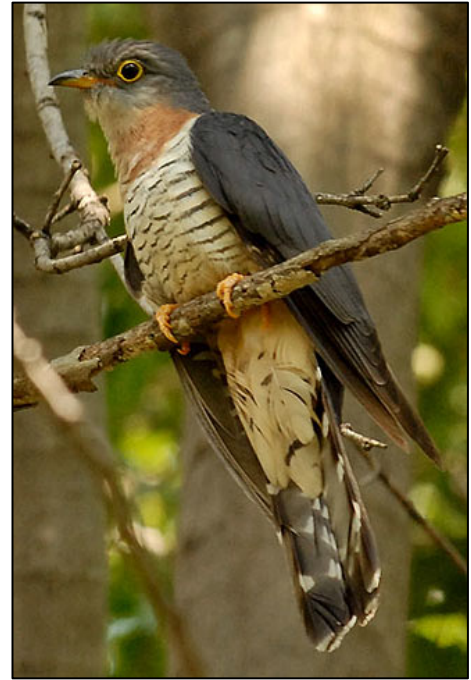
But they're heard.

Information taken from Newman's Birds of Southern Africa (2010)

Emerald cuckoo (photo by Jan Van den Broeck from birdforum.net)

Dideric's Cuckoo (photo by Reader from birdforum.net)

Red Chested Cuckoo (photo by Callie de Wet from flickr.com)



Mini Project:

Meat Free Mondays

Due to the environmental impact of the average diet in Europe and North America we have decided to implement a vegetarian day to show our volunteers how easy it can be to cook nutritious and delicious food without meat. With this we teach them about the impact of red meat on the world's resources and how unsustainable many farming practices are.

Jane Manyatsa cooks all the delicious meals, and is only too happy to have a vegetarian day. She'll make a great pizza or lasagne (which she bakes in the



coals of the fire), or perhaps a bean curry with a fresh salad.

Additionally, we aim to buy and consume locally produced products, especially fresh fruit and vegetables (at least until our own harvest comes along – we have our own vegetable patch – see the November Newsletter).

Project Focus

By Kieran Harkin

The past few months have been very productive at Kwa Tuli. In this project update, Conservation Manager Kieran Harkin shares the results of three of the projects volunteers have been working hard at.

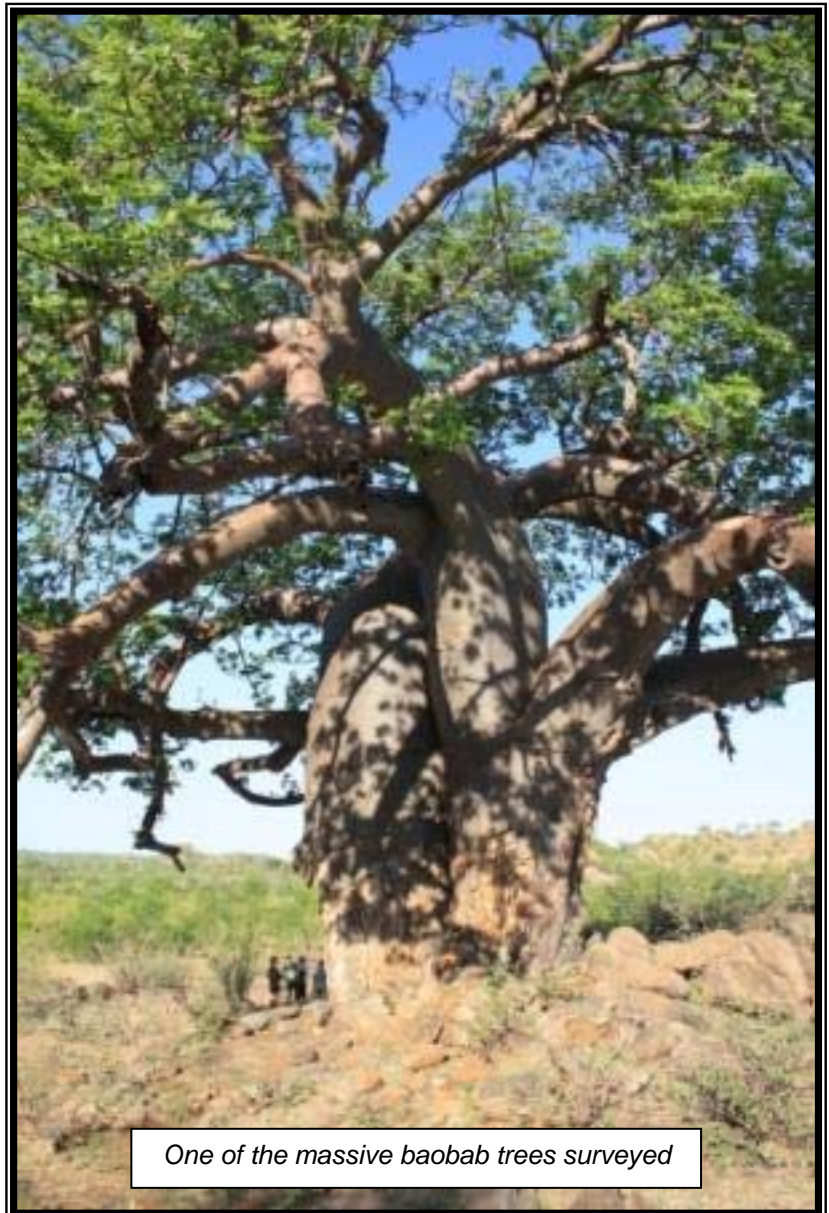
Baobab Survey

Project Summary

The Baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*) is an extremely beautiful, huge and ancient tree that truly defines the Tuli as a piece of African wilderness. With some of the trees older than Christianity, the management have made it a priority to preserve and enhance their numbers and habitat within Kwa Tuli and the Tuli Block. A survey of these trees has never been conducted in this area so Projects Abroad are immensely proud to be leading the first scientific study. Our survey consists of a series of measurements at each tree, inspecting them for disease, condition and animal activity. Our volunteers also record the GPS co-ordinates of each tree and photograph them. This provides an extensive database of each and every tree and allows for a record to be studied and referred to for years to come for any interested party.

Results to date

62 trees have already been surveyed – a greater number of trees than originally expected. An analysis of spatial distributions will be made at the end of the study. The results are indicating that the trees are in a healthy condition and most are producing their leaves (they only have leaves for three months per year), which again is a great sign for their overall health. Although some of the trees are showing signs of elephant damage, it is something that the project has brought to our attention and means we now have a tool to further monitor them.



One of the massive baobab trees surveyed

Alien Plant Removal

Project Summary

Invasive plants can have a significant effect in changing the natural landscape and are a serious threat to southern Africa's eco-systems. Some 80% of the region is vulnerable to at least one alien invader. All protected areas have programmes to combat these species, with Kwa Tuli being no exception. These plants use resources that are already limited and cause the decline of indigenous species. As the plants are alien, they themselves cannot be used as a resource by indigenous flora and fauna and therefore have no natural predators causing them to spread rapidly.

Results to date

Along the Limpopo River where Koro Camp is situated there has been a sharp increase in the amount of Prickly Pear Cactus. Our volunteers have been involved in the pain-staking task of removing the cactus and burning the remains to ensure it does not spread again. We have removed the cacti from a 2km stretch of the river and we are confident that with continued efforts we will eradicate this species from the reserve in the forthcoming months.



Volunteers destroying one of the prickly pears

Anti Poaching

Project Summary

As with any reserve within Africa, anti poaching is a necessity to ensure the protection of sought after wildlife for bush meat, medicines, curios and the pet trade. These demands on wildlife have brought some species to the brink of extinction in certain areas and as custodians of the land the management at Kwa Tuli have adopted several anti poaching measures to ensure our wildlife is safe from poachers. The techniques that our volunteers are directly involved with include patrols to show presence and the removal of snares.

Results to date

Due to a recent increase in the number of poaching activity within the reserve the majority of the work has been handed to the Botswana Defense Force to run patrols, an invaluable resource that we are extremely happy to be able to work with. Our volunteers have also been working by trekking through the bush to search for snares and remove them. We systematically search different areas on a rotation basis. Some of these areas are extremely remote and by showing our presence we have no doubt we are deterring further poaching activity. Our volunteers have also been involved in searching other properties where we believe poachers have been active. These areas are usually around water holes where wildlife may travel long distances to drink. Therefore our efforts benefit large areas and ensure the protection of wildlife within it. Recently we have been finding what we believe to be old snares; good news that there is no new activity in these areas.

Photo Page



Above left: Sakaeo, project supervisor, holds up a male kudu skull

Above right: Reegan Fraser (Canadian, 1 month) makes bread

Right: volunteer foot circle

Below right: A volunteer gets close to a male lion on one of our social trips.





Left: Vicky Ibbertson (English, 1 month), Mandy Rehork (German, 2 months), project supervisor Sakaeo, Karen Guthrie (Canadian, 2 months), camp attendant Innocent, Thibaut Juvet (Swiss, 2 months), Reegan Fraser (Canadian, 1 month), Amalie Jelstrup (Danish, 1 month), Simone Petersen (Danish, 1 month) and Floriane Margot (Swiss, 1 month) in front of the camp sign.

Below left: Maia Wong (French, 1 month), Simone Petersen (Danish, 1 month), Kasumi Suda (Japanese, 1 month) and Floriane Margot (Swiss 1 month).

Below: Simone and Maia in a fig tree over the Limpopo River.

Bottom left: the white rhinos we saw on a social.

Below right: A volleyball game





Photo by Maia Wong

