

Friends of Tembe Elephant Park

Newsletter #1 - Winter 2008



Hi Everyone

This is just a short snippet of news from your favourite place and what has been happening here over the last 3 months - **Winter!** I aim to distribute a newsletter each 3 months and keep you up to date on the happening and the planned in our Maputaland bush.

Yours in conservation

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1. Elephant Monitoring

The monitoring continues on a daily basis, Monday to Friday.

We have updated our ID kits and have expanded them to specifically show the breeding herds.

Since the Elephant Contraception Programme began in 2006 we have been awaiting the 22 month gestation period which is now upon us. We are very interested in observing breeding herd behaviour as they cease to breed.

2. Lion Monitoring

Since the demise of the 2 dominant males, the prides have split into 3 distinct groups. Tembe heads up the North group, Langa the South and the 4 most recent youngsters (2 males and 2 females) have been ousted and inhabit the Eastern area across the swamps. There was a very interesting incident at the end of August when Tembe clashed with the 2 young males and chased then through the electric fence at Muzi Inspection Quarters into the main camp - thereby immobilising the SAPS contingent and confining them to their rooms 😊. We were unable to see them due to the thick bush so Len and his section had to beat the bush on foot and soon the 2 lions were running ahead of the beaters and they avoided the gates we had left open for them and broke out through the electric fence in a different place. The fence has since been repaired.

3. Leopard Project



We were visited in July by Erik and Nikkie, volunteers from Holland to work on the Leopard project. This was Erik's second working visit to Tembe. The project's primary objective is to collar 2 Leopards to try to make them more "visible" to visitors to the park.

Erik and Nikkie braved the early morning darkness and cold to change flat tyres, drive by torchlight (Tuk Tuk's lights are 1 candlepower 😊) looking for Leopard spoor and collecting data.

We placed a bait up a tree and WOW, it was completely eaten in a few days!

Great news, we decided to go straight ahead and place a trap and hope for a quick result...



After a couple of weeks and a change of bait, time was running out!! No tracks near the bait area, until 😊! Sneaky, sneaky, she came on a Saturday night when Erik, Nikkie and I were out of the park and so all the darting, measuring, sampling, weighing (almost 50kgs) and

photographing was done by the Conservation Manager, Nick de Goede.

And so on the 27 July 2008, Tembe Elephant Park's first Leopard was collared. **Mabala** (Spotted One) is her name and she was pregnant. The immobilisation drug did not harm the foetus and we are awaiting confirmation from the Field Rangers any day now that there are little footprints following after Momma's.

Since we scan the area each day, we have detected her signal 9 times in August!

4. Volunteers



Well, we have had a few volunteers visiting our happy camp in the last quarter. I have mentioned Erik and Nikkie (above).

Then we had Chloe (aka Mayo from UK) and Melissa (aka. Vegas from USA) join us from CROW in urban along with Greg (aka. Kenny Logan from USA). Many were the laughs and jokes during the after dinner card games. We were fortunate enough to visit the Kapuza market in Mozambique for a look at a local market and also take the boat to Kosi for a day's fishing, swimming and sunshine. Along the many journeys, we saw some interesting stuff -

a 4m African Rock Python sunning itself on a cold day, a great day up the viewing platform looking at Hippo hoping that Elephant would come in. Thanks guys for the fun and smiles and all the dirty work that you pitched in with to get the Leopard trap set up and hidden sufficiently.

5. Mtuba Birder's Fundraising Weekend

We had a very successful weekend with 20 people attending. Some of the club members were fortunate to see Red Faced Mousebird, White Crested Helmet Shrike and the "Catch of the Day" Blue Throated Sunbird.

There were great fireside chats, excellent viewing on the viewing platform and many promises to return to TEP.

6. Staff

Hlengiwe has left us to move on to bigger things. She has been recruited by The Wildlands Trust and will be studying at the University of Zululand from 2009. We look forward to BIG things from our colleague and friend, Gundi!

Bongani was welcomed back to Elephant monitoring in mid August upon his return from a job at Disneyworld Florida. We hope that he enjoys being back and settles down to family life again.

7. Improvements

With some of the funding that has come in so far, I have acquired Linen, Blankets, pillows, Cooking utensils for the Research Camp, Spot lights for night work, Tables for the Research Camp Cabins and field work, a food cabinet to safe keep the food from the monkeys and bush babies, a video machine for the Research Camp.

8. Research Camp Renovation

In the coming months, I am planning the following work at the Research Camp:

- Refurbish the 3 concrete rooms;
- Refurbish the Kitchen/Lounge/Shower block area;
- Add a new geyser and upgrade the bathrooms;
- Secure funding to rebuild the wooden cabins (termite proof structures);
- Refurbish the electrics throughout the Camp.

I have completed the following at the Camp over the last few months:

- Installed Fire extinguishers;
- Installed First Aid Kits;
- Closed in the Research Office and installed an Airconditioner;
- Built a Braai area;
- Built a 3 carport.

9. Vehicles

The 2 Suzuki vehicles have been in dire need of parts, and tender loving care. I have done the following on them over the last few months and bought new:

- Tyres;
- Batteries;
- First Aid Kits;
- Fire Extinguishers;
- Jack and wheel spanners;
- Fuelpumps;
- Fuel filters;
- Carburettors
- Starter motors;
- Coils.

Unfortunately, they are still only semi serviceable and the work continues.

10. Next edition

- Rhino Capture - September - 6 White Rhinos;
- Arial Game count in October;
- Elephant Contraception in October;
- Suni Project - This project is to begin soon (subject to funding ☺).

11. Links

Check out these great links:

www.zulucam.com - This is the webcam at Mahlasela hide;

www.kznwildlife.com - KZN Wildlife;

www.wildlands.co.za - The Wildlands Trust;

www.peaceparks.org - Peaceparks Foundation;

www.noboundaries.co.za - SA Transfrontier Parks;

www.awf.org - Africa Wildlife Fund