



Sighting of the month: A bull elephant in the bush

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## Editor's Letter

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Dumela!

Many apologies for the lack of newsletters over the past 3 months, life at Legodimo has been a little hectic with G and Mieke planning their wedding, the arrival of 4 new members of staff and, of course, many new volunteers. However, the newsletters are available if you wish to take a look at what has been happening here since April, so you can check them out at: [www.projects-abroad.org/destinations/south-africa/newsletters-from-south-africa/](http://www.projects-abroad.org/destinations/south-africa/newsletters-from-south-africa/)

July has brought many changes to the bush, one of the most noticeable at Legodimo being the end (finally!) of the impala rutting season: things have calmed down a lot so you don't hear male impala fighting and grunting at all hours of the day and night.

We are looking forward to August/September when the weather should become a lot warmer (the evenings and early mornings are still a bit nippy right now) – although probably then we will wish it was winter again.

Hope you enjoy this month's news...



Sunrise in the bush

## Feature: Camera Traps

We ordered a number of new camera traps from the U.S. – small digital cameras which have an infrared sensor to detect movement and can be programmed to take either still photographs or film. This month we started to test some of them out within the reserve, and as the image quality is very good for both types we have been setting most of the cameras on video with just a few taking photos. They have been installed in a variety of different locations, starting with an old aardvark burrow that appeared to be used by Brian (our friendly, but large, local porcupine) and some of her friends. Although no porcupines appeared, we did get some videos of baboons grooming, plenty of waving leaves, and a couple of incredible close-up shots of an elephant's belly! Following that we moved upriver to set them out again – as the river level started to decline it provided some interesting opportunities. Here we were a little more successful (courtesy of Hubert, Phil and Alexis), with appearances of waterbuck, warthog, impala, vervet monkeys, porcupine and guinea fowl.

At the next location though, we were much luckier: Sam and several volunteers heard spotted hyena calling one night near to camp and thought that maybe they had made a kill. The following day we found dragmarks and track leading along the road to the small blind up at the seepline, an area with a natural water source, en route to the 'office'. This became our third site and we were richly rewarded with videos of spotted hyena, elephant, kudu, warthog and zebra. But it did have some bad results also. In an attempt to dissuade animals from chewing on the cameras they were all placed about chest height and then covered with hot peri-peri chilli powder. This was not altogether effective – 2 of the 4 cameras seemed to have been left undisturbed, while one was ripped off its post and stomped on by an elephant (there is some incredible footage of this) and the other was seemingly crunched up by a hyena, the resulting dents going right the way through to the batteries!



Don't worry, they are still working and we will definitely carry on setting them up around the reserve, especially near to the reliable water sources as the dry season advances.

Left: An elephant having fun in a waterhole!

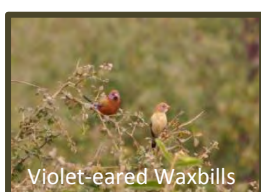
One very sad result of this last set-up was the discovery of a young elephant, not more than 5 years old, with a snare wrapped around his left front leg. It was obviously in a lot of pain so after consulting with our neighbours at Kwatuli, Helena and Judi, who have run a wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centre for many years, we will return very soon with a couple of cameras to that same waterhole to try and locate the animal and assist it in some way. This shows that there are still poachers who operate in this area so our continued presence and work here are vital to try and discourage people from trying to illegally trap the animals, and also so that we can remove any wire left behind from the cattle fencing which could potentially harm any of the wildlife which passes through or takes up residence on our reserve.

Right: A leopard visiting the same waterhole at night



## New & Updates

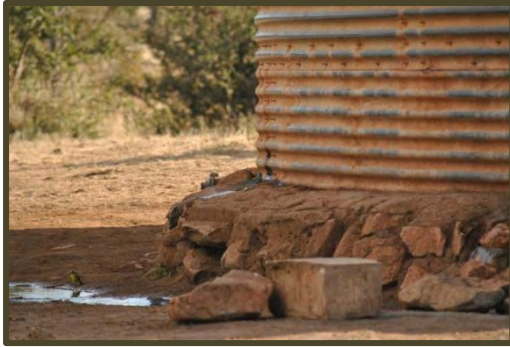
**ELEPHANT HIDE:** To the north of the main road we now have 3 waterholes which we fill on a regular basis for the wildlife, 2 of them with hides built nearby so we can sit quietly and observe. This season they have been plagued with problems though – at the first, the waterpipe which was cemented in place at the higher of the 2 pools there was torn away from the wall. Since this was repaired last month the lower pool connected to it was also damaged. When the motor is on, water is pumped up from the borehole into the higher cement pool, and from there flows down to the lower pool which is dug from the ground. This has a ballcock mechanism, rather like that of a toilet, which was covered by a slab of concrete and several large chunks of rock to prevent it being damaged by animals. After almost a week of passing this waterhole every day to pump water both pools were finally full and we were looking forward to watching the local wildlife come down to drink.



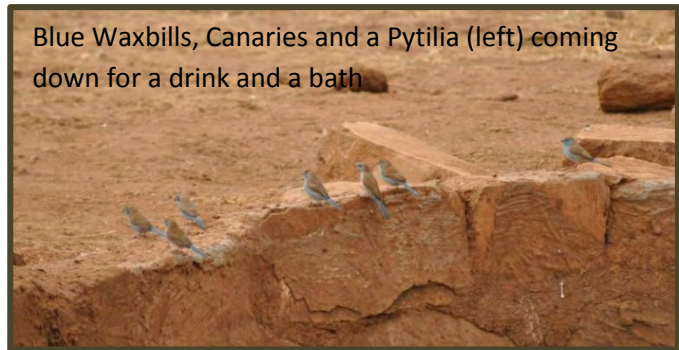
Returning a day later, however, we found the concrete slab ripped away and the ballcock smashed and torn off also, resulting in all the water draining away from the higher pool and consequently flooding the ground immediately around the lower pool!

The birdlife in the area was having a wonderful time, we saw violet-

eared waxbills, black-faced waxbills and blue waxbills drinking and bathing, along with yellow-fronted canaries and some beautiful green-winged pytilias.



Blue Waxbills, Canaries and a Pytilia (left) coming down for a drink and a bath



The second waterhole, another 15 minutes drive to the north, also had a few problems. Overlooking this dam is a 4m-high blind from which you have a wonderful view of the surrounding area. For almost 1 month now we have been unable to use this blind due to termite damage of the pole on one side of the access ladder, so we brought a new pole from Bobonong and went out to replace the damaged one ..... only to find that there was now also a break in the other pole!

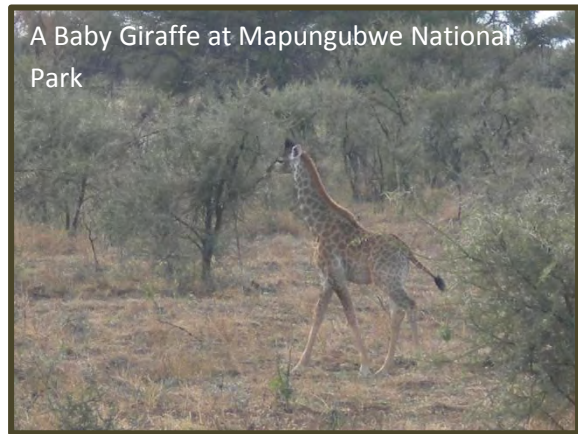
So this month blind observation has been a little limited, but we will hopefully rectify this shortly.

KWATULI: This month we took our first group to stay at Koro Camp in the Kwatuli Reserve, one of our neighbours in the Trans-Frontier Wildlife Area. Judi and Helena, the owners, have many years of experience working and teaching nature conservation and wildlife rescue & rehabilitation and proposed a 4-day workshop for our volunteers to learn about the importance of birds and how to identify them, also the overall importance of nature conservation in southern Africa. Koro camp overlooks the Limpopo River and is set in a wonderful old stand of leadwood trees. The volunteers along with a member of staff are treated to a unique view of the wildlife (along with a delicious menu) and were able to apply their newfound knowledge to our activities on the Legodimo Reserve.



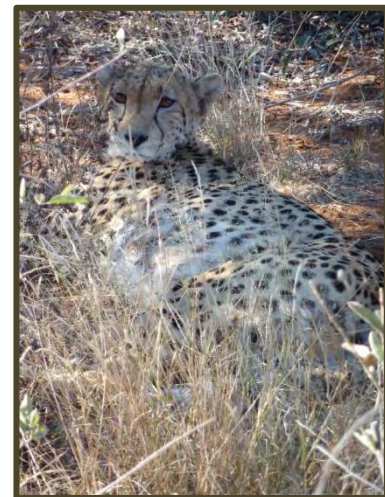
Koro Camp on the Kwatuli Reserve

COMMUNITY WORK: With large numbers of volunteers scheduled to arrive in July, we can go forward with part of our program to help out in the local area. Trying to properly manage and conserve the flora and fauna within Legodimo is admirable but it will not be entirely effective unless we also try to assist with conservation efforts and environmental education programs in the local communities. The nearest protected area in South Africa is just across the Limpopo River and a little way downstream:



A Baby Giraffe at Mapungubwe National Park

Mapungubwe National Park is very rich in both wildlife and history. We start taking groups there this month to assist the park rangers in the western section, including important activities such as fence repair, snare removal and making fire breaks. The volunteers get the opportunity to see areas of the park off limits to the general public and are able to admire the stunning scenery and wildlife, and also learn about the rich cultural history of Mapungubwe Hill. Combined with this is a visit to Umkwali Reserve to look for cheetahs with Antony of Vision Africa using radio-tracking equipment. Antony dedicates his time to educating local landowners on how to live with and protect the wild cheetahs, a venture that relies on visitors coming in to learn about these increasingly rare animals. Also the reserve has a wide variety of game so the drives are very interesting.



Above: Rebecca, the Cheetah, relaxing under a bush in the heat of the day



Left: a group taking in the sights at Mapungubwe

**SIGHTINGS: Elephants Everywhere!**

They have been emerging from the bush in huge numbers (well, larger numbers than seen in the last 2 months) delighting both staff and volunteers all around the reserve.

Another slightly more common sighting than usual recently is that of the white impala –not a true albino but much paler in colour than the animals we usually see!



Right: one of the local impalas with our white impala – okay so not snowy white but definitely much paler than usual!



## Staff Page

With the busy period in July and August, we welcomed 2 extra staff members this month to help out:

Dave Pugh, who has come out from England for 2 months. He loves the bush, has worked at Legodimo before and knows how everything runs so will be a good asset.

Andrew Jackson, a nature conservation graduate who studied with Sam, he joins us from South Africa for 3 months to gain a little extra work experience and spend more time in the bush.

We know they will both be good additions to our conservation team.

WEDDING: Gerrit and Mieke, our Director and Desk Officer, left us on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July to prepare for their wedding on the 10<sup>th</sup>! They have been busy planning for months and although we are sad to see them go, we know that they will have a wonderful time on their honeymoon and we look forward to hearing about their adventures when they return.

## Volunteer Corner

MAPUNGUBWE – by Colleen Dooley, U.S.A.

On July 20<sup>th</sup> 2010 Pam and Paul took us for an adventure at Mapungubwe! On our first day we followed rangers to find snares set by poachers. We hiked the beautiful red rocks and enjoyed the African blue sky. We saw a giraffe and many elephants. We also learned about the difference between a lion footprint and a hyena's. Later that day we went to a crocodile farm and we each held a baby crocodile.

Our next day's journey began with a heritage tour with a very kind man named Cedric. He brought us to the top of the Mapungubwe Hill and told us the history of the land. After our tour we went to the confluence point to have lunch. We were over-looking Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana, an incredible sight. We hung out there and fell asleep in the sun☺. On our way home we saw baby giraffes and baby zebras. When we got home, back to our tents, we ended our night as we usually do – with laughter and card games – such a good day.

For our 3<sup>rd</sup> day we set out early with the rangers to help put up a fence that the elephants had destroyed. But because we are a very curious bunch of people, we got distracted and had to climb a large rock just to see the view. Turns out only one volunteers had to do a lot of work, oops, but we made up for it by helping clear around the fence with machetes.



Afterwards we were headed home when a giant elephant stood in our path, unmoving, and blocking our way. Pam and Paul revved the engine loudly (as instructed by the rangers) and the elephant just stared, everyone was waiting to see how the elephant would react. Paul revved the engine again and again to show the elephant that we were going to win this stare-off. Finally the elephant realised we had won and stepped off the path. Victory! That night we watched the Lion King, a movie we felt was very fitting.

That concludes our trip at Mapungubwe. It was an amazing experience with a very friendly bunch of people, every day was filled with unbelievable sights and smiles 😊 I love it here. Best trip ever.