



Bush Telegraph

The Official Newsletter for Southern Africa Conservation

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LEGODIMO NATURE RESERVE IS SITUATED ON THE BANKS OF THE LIMPOPO RIVER. IT IS A PART OF THE TULI BLOCK IN THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA.



Editor's Note:

Welcome to June's Bush Telegraph and I hope I can update you all on the happenings and occurrences in the great Legodimo Conservation Reserve this month.

Big work in North camp. renovations and new beds at base camp, and a report of another Conservation Project that has just started which involves a biodiversity drive that will create a species list of all the animals living in the area.

Sleep outs, eat outs, lunar eclipse, cries of hyena, jackals and leopards are a few of the exciting things that have been occurring.

So sit back, relax and enjoy as we fill you in with the tales from the bush.....

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Feature: North Camp at Legodimo



The main project at Legodimo this month has been building our North Camp base. As the volunteers are increasing in numbers every year there has been a growing need for extra accommodation and space along with an additional need for a base where volunteers can spend time in the Northern part of the reserve to monitor potential threats by poachers and to embark on maintenance work in the form of fence removal, tree wrapping, road work and land rehab. By diminishing the need for daily travel from and back to base camp, this spot promises to be a breath of fresh air. Being near 'Elephant dam', the animal spotting is immense and a huge family of baboons occupy the adjacent field which are also dispersed with warthog families and masses of impala.

The starting point for this project has been the old derelict house that Janni, one of the local staff was born in. In the depth of dilapidation on first observation its presence had a welcoming flare so the picture of a rejuvenated up to date bush camp wasn't too hard to envision.

On the first day, and only literally scratching the surface of the 2 1/2 metre septic tank that was to be dug, daunting loads of sand were tipped onto the front veranda and numerous collections of rocks were loaded into wheelbarrows. I remember the first day well, with Ian and G taking measurements and marking out spots under the scorching heat of the day and each shovel of earth, although edging a little closer to get the project on its way, seemed like the start of an eternal task.

Volunteers have come and gone on the project as it continues, hundreds of empty recycled glass bottles have been filled with sand and used in the foundations of the building work, machetes and saws, led by our two Australian volunteers Sam and Michelle, have diligently worked on clearing a space for the shower and toilet blocks and tent plinths. The septic tank hole was no mean feat as the majority of the work meant digging in a rock quarry and if it hadn't been for Janni and Sakaao, the pick axe pros, progress would have probably terminated in the second week. However to be fair, a number of volunteers, hands blistered and backs sore for days have laboured away at that hole as well. Rob, Rene, Pascal and Jaques to name a few have had some back breaking days but success endured and the hole has eventually been completed.



Janni at work.



In the second phase of the project, two local builders, Nelson and Alfred from the neighbouring town of Mathatane, were taken on board and the commencement of bricks and concrete, shaped the construction work into a liveable habitat.

However volunteers work has been immense, sleep outs at the camp whilst the work was underway have kept a dynamic realisation to the work in progress and many have enjoyed a night under the stars even embroiling on the lunar eclipse which was a spectacular nights entertainment to watch under the large open sky.

The project is nearly completed and it won't be long before the tents are erected and the stove is hooked up. Many of our present and future volunteers will soon be able to experience and enjoy the fruits of the labour of the last couple of months which will hopefully be the start of many adventures and good times here for the years to come.



Left: digging the water pipe trench

Below: sand filled glass bottles for the tent plinth foundations





New Beds and a Facelift at Base Camp

This month the accommodation at Base Camp got a bit of a facelift. Sam, Meike and Fran, armed with paint brushes and stencils, mosaics and artful 'green' slogans, began the task of making the place look brighter and a little funkier. Emerging from this frenzy came the perfect back drop for the swanky, new, solid wood bunk beds that had just arrived this week. Sparkly and squeaky, new and awesome, delights and smiles all round as each volunteer chose their new space.

Saving a Black Eagle Chick

For a few weeks now Andy, along with a volunteer or two, are taking walks into the bush every couple of days. Spotting a Black Eagle carrying twigs and scrub back to a spot on a side of a Kopje a while ago, his curiosity sought him to climb the rock to take a closer look. Observing that this magnificent bird was building a new abode and keeping in mind the possibility of new additions to be shortly arriving in the nest he decided to keep a watchful eye open. When the eggs were laid the visits to the nest increased with the sole intent on perhaps being able to prevent a 'Cain and Abel' scenario happening as is typical with this species of birds. Indeed it is the case that the stronger of the two sibling chicks will kill the other.

With this in mind, Andy has been patiently waiting for the eggs to hatch and is now making his journeys almost on a daily basis when he can. His idea is to remove one of the chicks when it is about 2-3 days old and to take it to our neighbours Helene and Judy at the Kwa Tuli Lodge where they operate an animal Rehabilitation Facility.

The plan is for them to look after the young bird until it is strong enough and able to fend for itself in the wild. As the story unfolds we will keep you updated.

The 'Office' Python

From when it hibernated is anyone's guess but a few weeks ago, Chris, our Volunteer Co-ordinator, lent over his desk to open a cupboard draw to get some printer paper. Not putting his hand inside immediately and just glancing down to see the contents of the drawer, he swiftly jerked back and was a little shocked at his find. Quickly closing the drawer he announced what he had just observed and it definitely wasn't printer paper! Smiling in disbelief he described that coiled in a half dozen spirals and snugly fitting into the back of the draw was a hibernating python! The draw was subsequently taped up tightly with the agreement of everyone in the office with the aim of creating minimum disturbance of this cheeky reptile while it slept out the winter in peace.



'Office' sign in mosaics created by Pauline Vocher



Andy shows the group the young chick he has just rescued from the nest.





'Tug of War' challenge at Legodimo Olympics



Above: Elettra, Jacob and Carlo from Italy learning the Tree Wrap method.
 Left: Syver and the Hippo.
 Below left: Alicen from the USA collects her team prize at the Legodimo Olympics



Above: Kevin looking for coins at the Legodimo Olympics
 Middle left: Liam and Syver 'Tree wrapping'.
 Below right: Weekend crew at North Camp



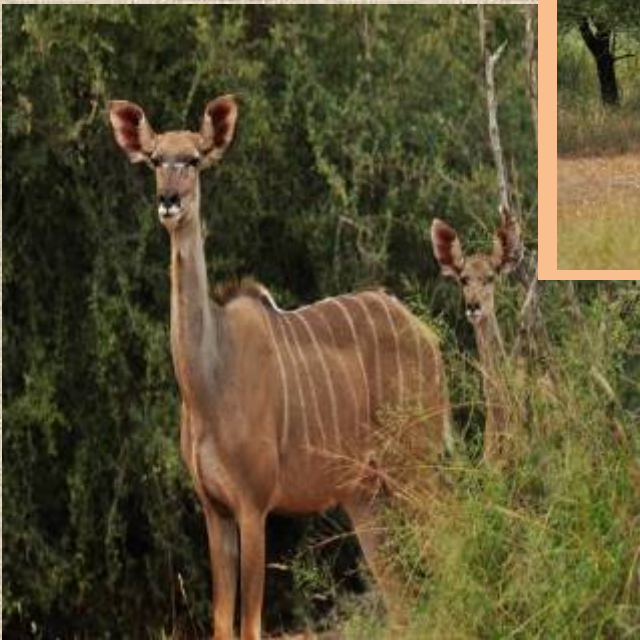
The Biodiversity of Legodimo



Sam, our Volunteer Co-ordinator, has recently started a new project here at Legodimo. Her goal along with the help of the volunteers is to create a species list of all the animals that can be found here on the reserve including mammals, birds of prey and large reptiles. Her vision is to keep expanding this list enabling information such as seasonal variation of animal trends and habitats to be known. The eco-system of the area is a reflection of the diversity of the species found. A 'Bio-drive' undertaken on a weekly or sometimes bi-weekly basis with the volunteers which entails a drive out to marked 'spoor' quadrant or 'tracking' quads and noting down the animal imprints in the soil is the implemented method. Specifically situated camera traps in these areas are also used.

The advantage of this method over the previous 'research' drives that the volunteers undertook, is that it gives a much better idea of the variety of animals in the reserve as some wouldn't be noticeable in the daytime on the drive itself for such reasons as them being shy, nocturnal or just simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The method used is to choose a relatively flat open area and marking out 4 quadrants then raking the area to make a clear surface. On visiting the spots on a regular basis the volunteers carefully identify all the footprints imprinted in the soil and note them in a logbook; in doing so these findings are an ongoing method in helping to expand the species list here at Legodimo.



Sam and the volunteers checking the 'spoor' quadrants for animal tracks.



Never a shortage of Baboon prints!

Pauline on the 'Tracker' Seat of the Landrover



Bottom right:

G reports Leopard tracks among the variety of spoor prints in the soil.



Volunteer story



The Big Baobab Tree

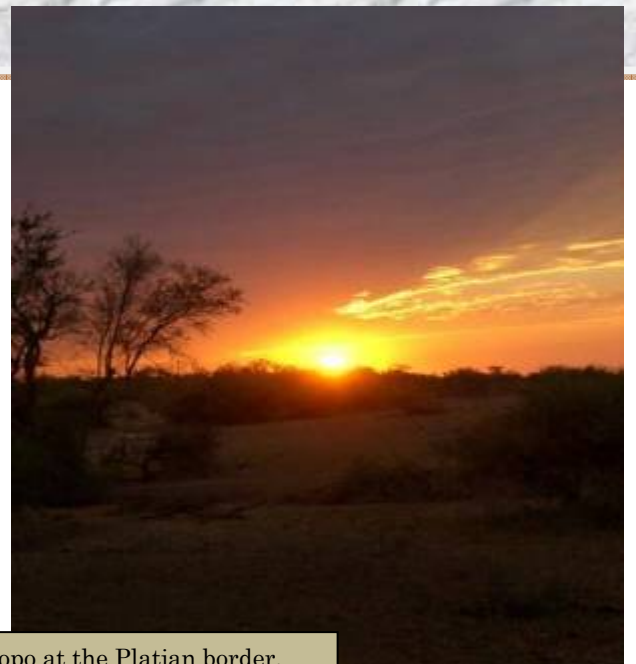
La mia esperienza sudafricana

L' Africa, è sempre stato nei miei pensieri un continente misterioso, pieno di sorprese, e posti esotici da esplorare. Mi avevano spesso parlato del mal d' Africa, definito come una sensazione di nostalgia di chi ha visitato l' Africa e desidera tornarci. L' ho sperimentata anch' io questa strana emozione, sull' aereo di ritorno dal Sud- Africa.

Ormai è passato tanto tempo, ma me lo ricordo come fosse ieri; estate 2009, io e un' amica, zaino in spalla, siamo partite per fare volontariato in una riserva naturale, situata proprio al confine Sudafrica- Botswana, una piccola oasi di paradiso costeggiata dal fiume Limpopo. Eravamo a Legodimo. Personalmente, devo dire che sono appassionata di animali e ritrovarsi in mezzo al nulla , circondata da elefanti, zebre, impala, ippopotami era una gran bella cosa!

Fuori da tutte le regole della società, dove solo le leggi della natura prevalgono, ho imparato a vivere senza elettricità, tecnologia. Le docce erano all' esterno, ognuno aveva la propria torcia per potersi spostarsi più facilmente quando calava il buio. Ogni sera ci radunavamo attorno al falò a raccontarci storie, ridere, suonare i tamburi. Ogni giorno era diverso, sempre nuove cose da fare, nuove cose da imparare. Si lavorava nella riserva. Bisognava rimuovere dei fili di ferro che erano serviti a segnare i confini molto tempo prima e che oggi giorno posso ferire gli animali, costruire nuovi abbeveratoi per gli elefanti, salire sulle montagne (che erano più dei collinotti) per calcolare l' altitudine e fare così una mappa topografica della riserva. E tante altre cose. Una era la regola da rispettare in caso ti trovassi in vicinanza di un animale: 'whatever you do, don' t run'.

A Legodimo non si può non essere tranquilli, non si può non essere felici, perché si vive in simbiosi con la natura, ed è attraverso essa che abbiamo la possibilità di imparare a conoscerci, di capire chi siamo veramente!



Left: Walk across the Limpopo at the Platjan border.

Right: North Camp Sunset.



Staff page:



Meike and Gerrit



Ian, Chris and Fran



Sam and Andrew

And Finally...

And Finally...

As always I hope you all enjoyed hearing some news from Legodimo! And as usual we always enjoy hearing from you all, it's been ages since some of you got in touch with us and some of you that have only just left still haven't let us know you are safe, how are you getting on and where are you all now?

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or queries, anything you want to know about the bush that you didn't learn while you were here or anything you have forgotten! If anyone has some time to spare and you find your mind wondering back to your time at Legodimo we would love to hear some of your stories and experiences. We are in the process of updating the conservation website and any volunteer stories or quotes would be very gratefully welcomed!

Thank you!

Fran Karol, Social Manager



Sleep out at the North Camp build.



Winter walk to 'The Highest Point'.



African Fish Eagle spotted on 'River Loop' research drive.



Aurelie, Andy and Matt working on 'Land Rehab'.



The Baobab tree where a leopard was spotted basking in the early morning sun (unfortunately due to the awe in seeing it a photo of the animal was not taken!!)