

# ProjectsAbroad™

The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad Conservation Southern Africa

Issue No. 11 November 2011



Volunteers working on building a dam for the dry season:  
Simone Petersen (Danish), Amalie Jelstrup (Danish), Victoria Ibbertson (English), Reegan Fraser (Canadian), Thibaut Juvet (Swiss), Floriane Margot (Swiss)  
front row: Sakaeo Manyatsa (Botswanan staff), Karen Guthrie (Canadian) and Mandy Rehork (German)

## What's Inside

Editor's Note	2
Volunteer story: Camp Creepy Crawlies – by Karen Guthrie	3
Volunteer story: Hippo Tracking – by Amalie Groenvald Jelstrup	5
Free Time	6
Feature: The Nursery	7
Project Focus	8
Photo Page	9
Staff Contact Details	11
Volunteers in Country	12

# Editor's Note

Dumela!

Greetings from the Botswana bush – a very different landscape from a month ago! Since then, we've had roughly 30mm of rain, and it's amazing to see the change in the landscape. Where before the bush was brown, grey, brittle and dry, even the scattered storms we've had were enough to encourage new growth. The mopane, purple-podded terminalia and baobab trees have all erupted into thick, green bush, and the animals have something to eat again. This is especially important this time of year, as many females are currently pregnant, and they need their energy for the difficult months ahead – raising cubs, pups, calves and lambs isn't easy. Summer is upon us, with the first heat-wave striking at over 44°C in the shade. Luckily it only lasted about 4 days, and the temperature remains at a fairly constant 33°C max.

In this month's newsletter, we'll hear from two volunteers. Karen Guthrie (from Canada, here for 2 months) will introduce you to the camp creepy-crawlies on page 3, and Amalie Gronvald Jelstrup (from Denmark, 1.5 months) writes (in Danish and English) about tracking hippos on page 5.

Have a look at page 6 to see what volunteers do in their free time. The feature this month is about an ongoing project, the nursery. See page 7 to see how this project has progressed. An overview of an ongoing project – alien plant removal – as well as a sleep-out are highlighted on page 8.

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

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  
Projects Abroad Kwa Tuli Conservation Project

[southafrica-cons@projects-abroad.org](mailto:southafrica-cons@projects-abroad.org)

# Camp Creepy Crawlies

**Things that go bump in the night...and day**

by Karen Guthrie (Canadian, 33, 2 months)

It is said that, at any given time, you are never more than 1 meter away from a spider. For a severe arachnophobic like myself, coming to Africa may not have been the best decision. Here, I believe that you are never more than 1 *foot* away from one. Although I am, and always have been, terrified of spiders, I also find them absolutely fascinating at the same time.

It only took 2 days before my first encounter. It was my second night and I was already on edge just thinking about what was under this rock, or on the branch that I just brushed passed by, or what I will find in my sleeping bag before bed. On this particular night I woke up from a peaceful sleep to go to the bathroom and as I was sitting down I noticed a slight movement out of the corner of my eye. Sure enough it was a thick, long legged, hairy spider just staring me down. I grabbed my camera and took a picture. No one will believe that this spider was the size of my hand! The next day I looked it up in the spider + scorpion book and narrowed it down to being a rain spider, which is not poisonous....PHEUFF!



This bathroom turned out to be a hot bed of spider activity because it was only just the next night that I met my second friend. This ~~little~~ big guy came out from under the mirror to have a look at me while I brushed my teeth. Knowing that this is what my next 2 months would be like, I pressed on with brushing my teeth while watching him watching me and then again grabbed my camera and the book. This guy is the wall spider and we find him quite often in our tents; once again, not poisonous.

By the 2<sup>nd</sup> week I was slowly getting used to all these close encounters and was brave enough to rescue this guy from a horrible death by drowning when we opened up the pool. As water was slowing filling into the pool this one crawled out from the drain along with a frog. I couldn't bear to



see either of them drown so I scooped them up with the dust pan and brought them to safety.



It's not only spiders that we get to see on a regular basis. Scorpions are also fond of coming into camp to check things out. Being born in November under the sign of Scorpio I actually have a fondness for these critters, and it turns out that this Rock Scorpion lives under our step heading up to the tent. Not a problem for me since he'll eat the spiders.

Along with the scorpion, we also have 2 other pets that live with us in our tent. We have a bat that lives just under the canvas roof as well as a little gecko that we call 'Elizabeth' who lives inside. This is just fine by me since again, they will both eat the spiders and mosquitoes.



With all these spiders, scorpions and bats that are all over camp there is still one creepy crawly that I don't think I will ever get used to. They look like a hybrid between an ant and a spider but they are NOT spiders nor are they ants. They are called Solifuges but we refer to them as SPANTS. They are fast, big, aggressive and not at all scared of us. They most always come out at dinner time or shortly after when we are all winding down after a long day. They don't hesitate to crawl up on our feet, on the table, on the chairs and usually have all the girls looking for higher ground.



At the end of the day, when I look around at the beauty of where I have been for the last 2 months, these critters are all part of the amazing experience of being here and I wouldn't change a thing! When I go back to Canada in 4 days I am happy to say that Africa has slowly helped to chip away the arachnophobia in me.

*Photos by Karen Guthrie*



# Opsporing af en flodhest



Amalie Groenvald Jelstrup (20, Danish, 2 months)

Regntiden er begyndt, hvilket har resulteret i, at der er kommet en hel del mere vand i Limpopo floden som i kan se paa overstaende billede.

Vi fandt dens spor ved flodkanten og fulgte dem ned langs floden. Vi var naesten lige ved at opgive at finden den da vi endlige saa den dukke op af vandet



Det betyder at der nu er vand nok til at flodhestene kan komme tilbage. Den ene var lige neden for campen i gaar aftes, men da jeg allerede var gaet i seng saa jeg den desvaerre ikke. Derfor tog Mandy, Sakaeo (vores lokal guide) og jeg i dag ud for at opspore den.

midt ude i floden. Den var vildt stor og meget taet paa. Det foeltes lidt som en skattejagt og det var enormt tilfredstillede at faktisk at finde flodhesten ved at lede efter dens spor i naturen.



## Hippo Tracking

(translated by Simone Petersen)

Now that the rains have begun, there's more water in the Limpopo River, as you can see in the two pictures I took. This means that the hippos are coming back. There was one was

right in front of our camp yesterday evening, but unfortunately I didn't see it because I had already gone to bed. That's why Mandy (Rehork, German, 2 months), Sakaeo (our fieldguide) and I went looking for its tracks.

We found the tracks by the riverbank and followed it along the river. We almost gave up but then finally we saw its head popping out of the water. It was very big and very close. Looking for the hippo felt a bit like a treasure hunt and it was really satisfying actually finding the hippo by searching for its tracks in nature.

*Photos by Amalie Jelstrup*

# Free Time

A typical day here at the Projects Abroad Conservation camp at Koro starts early. It's coming into summer and the morning activity starts around 5.30 am, so that we've done a good few hours before the sun gets too hot to work.

We're back at camp for a lunch, and some free time, and then back in the bush with

the afternoon activity around 3.00 pm. After that it's back to camp for some free time, and a delicious dinner! We do this Monday – Saturday, and on Sunday it's our day off: more free time.

What do volunteers do with their free time? Take a swim, shoot some pictures, study up on the birds and animals, chat, snooze and relax.

Recently, they've also tried their hand at fishing.

Koro camp lies directly on the banks of the Limpopo River, and we see fish often. It was only a matter of time before free time involved trying to catch some fish – and we've done well! The first big one caught was by Delphine Laforse (20, French, 3 weeks), but others quickly followed.

The fish are cleaned, and then prepared for the evening *braai* (barbeque) – delicious with a little lemon, salt, pepper and chili flakes.

*Photos by Victoria Ibbertson*



Mandy Rehork, Sakaeo and Thibaut Juvet fishing along the banks of the Limpopo River.



Thibaut Juvet with his catch

# Feature: Koro Camp Nursery



Not long after we first settled at Koro camp, volunteers got busy erecting a nursery. First the ground had to be cleared of debris. Then deep holes for the fence-posts were dug – difficult work in the hard-baked earth. Once the posts were in, the nursery was enmeshed in wire to prevent monkeys, porcupines, baboons and birds from eating the plants. To do this the wire had to be dug into the ground – otherwise the nursery would be vulnerable to animals digging underneath the fence. Finally the whole area was covered with shade-cloth. Several beds were prepared and the seeds planted. Diligent care and daily watering has resulted in tiny seedlings

emerging after a few short weeks.

In the coming months we're looking forward to our very own supply of fresh spinach, onions, chilies, and beans.

Watering the nursery is part of the daily chores around camp – water is collected from the Limpopo River (volunteers are always careful to look out for crocodiles) and with the ground being as thirsty as it is, this is quite a chore. But it's well worth it as every few days we see new growth and we're all looking forward to our first harvest!



*Top: Volunteers Jeff Dubus and Peter Hansen erect the corner posts, while Sakaeo, Udo Fuehrer and Hannah Cartwright 'supervise'. (photo by Karen Guthrie)*



*Centre and above left: the new plant growth.*

*Above right: Getting the seedlings ready (photo by Karen Guthrie)*

# Project Focus

In the past month volunteers have been very busy with activities twice a day. Here are two of the highlights.

## Sleep Outs:

A few weeks ago, Director Helena took volunteers on a bush-sleep out near a semi-permanent water hole. This time we weren't on a raised platform (as when we're sleeping out at Mamatumi Hide), but slept right on the ground outside! To be absolutely sure no animal would accidentally stumble on the group, volunteers and staff took turns staying up throughout the whole night. Everyone did a 2 hour watch with at least one other person. It's an eerie feeling, being the only people awake in the bush, listening to the silence and watching the stars...



Left: Volunteers Amalie Jelstrup (20, Danish, 6 weeks), Mandy Rehork (33, German, 2 months) and Delphine Laforce (20, French, 3 weeks) sit on their beds in the bush.

Right: Kieran and Helena enjoy their dinner.

## Alien Plant Removal:

Alien plants are plants that do not occur indigenously in an area; they've been introduced by humans, and compete with indigenous flora for water and nutrients. One particularly invasive alien is the prickly pear, which volunteers remove.

First, they do the tough job of hacking away at this cactus with a machete (or *panga*) – let's just say that it's not called a *prickly* pear for nothing! Once all the plants in the area have been collected, they're left on a pile to dry out for a day or two, but it's important not to leave them there too long. They're spread by rain and wind, and so they need to be destroyed before they can grow again.

The next step in eradicating the prickly pear is to burn them. First an area needs to be cleared around the cacti, so that the bush doesn't accidentally catch fire, then firewood needs to be collected. In order to ensure the fire's hot enough to destroy the plant completely we also use a little petrol to encourage the flames.



Sakaeo fuels the fire with a dose of petrol, while Thibaut Juvet watches

# Photo Page



*From top left: Jane braaiing chicken for dinner (photo by Amalie Jelstrup).*

*Sakaeo and volunteers Mandy Rehork, Karen Guthrie and Laurent Taevernier sitting on the tractor after collecting rocks for land rehabilitation (photo by Amalie Jelstrup).*

*Amalie Jelstrup dances with one of the Zebras at the social (photo by Reegan Fraser).*

*Pinki shows us how to carry a bucket on her head. (photo by Amalie Jelstrup)*

*Volunteers Flo Margot, Mandy Rehork, Karen Guthrie, Vicky Ibbertson and Simone Petersen at a social. (photo by Gisela Madden)*



*Right:* An elephant and her calf drink from a waterhole.

*Below:* A leopard tortoise

*(photos by Flo Margot)*



*Right:* So much to see! Thibaut Juvet points at something, while Amalie Jelstrup, Reegan Fraser and Karen Guthrie look to the road.

*(photo by Vicky Ibberston)*



## Staff Contact Details

[www.projects-abroad.net](http://www.projects-abroad.net)

Projects Abroad Kwa Tuli Conservation  
Project  
Bobonong  
PO BOX 1433  
Botswana

Kieran Harkin  
Conservation Manager

Dr Helena Fitchat  
Conservation Director

Gisela Madden  
Desk Officer & Camp Manager

