



Three of the reserves youngsters in full stride on route to the water hole

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Bike 4 Beasts MTB Challenge 2009



Location: Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve, South Africa

Date: 24-04-2009 – 27-04-2009

At the end of last month Projects Abroad were asked to lend a hand at this years Bike 4 Beasts cycle challenge on Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve, which of course we were more than willing to do! So on the afternoon of Friday 24th April we packed the essentials and headed over the border to the reserve. The following article about the weekend has been written by one of our current volunteers;

Our weekend on Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve;



'On the 24th of April, 9 volunteers and all 3 staff members travelled to the Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve in South Africa. This 30,000 hectare reserve is owned by the adjoining De Beer's Diamond mine and is also vital to conservation of Wild Dogs. Every year De Beer's and Land Rover sponsor a bike race, of which all the funds go directly to protecting an endangered animal, this year it was the Cheetah.

The Projects Abroad team played a big part in setting up prior to the big day. During the race itself we manned 2 of the many checkpoints along the route, making sure all the competitors passed each point and handing out cold drinks to the dehydrated. Free time was spent chilling by the pool and mixing with other volunteer groups and members of the Venetia staff.

Overall the weekend was a big success. The weather was beautiful and a record-breaking amount of money was raised. All the volunteers and staff had a good time even though we, unfortunately, didn't find any diamonds!

Jo Klitsie – 17/04/09-04/06/09



Setting up Camp



At the start/finish line on race morning



Tackling 1 of the many deep sandy sections



A fallen cyclist reflects



Taking a well earned break

The volunteers helped out wherever and with whatever they could; putting together signs to mark the course, making up race packs, moving tables & chairs, carrying drinks, food and anything else that needed moving, putting together banners and putting these up along the finish line, to name but a few of the tasks required of them. Then on race day they handed out water, took photos as the riders passed and offered shouts of encouragement so we would like to say a big thank you guys for all the help you gave!!

Limpopo River Tree Platform

When the new waterhole was complete it was time to start on the next project; a platform in one of the many impressive trees along the river bank. Originally, it was to be built near to the weir, however upon their reconnaissance mission a suitable tree was not to be found, so another spot was proposed much closer to camp.

This particular spot overlooks a rocky sand bank and a small grass island section. This seemed the perfect spot for the platform as it appears from the numerous tracks that lots of animals come to drink here. There is also the potential to see crocodiles swimming about, hippos keeping cool, many wading shore birds and other birds that just happen to be flying past.

Having already built the tree platform in the Nyala berry tree at camp, Jamie was the man for the job! So again he and the volunteers spent much time in uncomfortable positions clinging to a tree but the finished result is great.



Bart and Jamie hard at work securing the deck



Adding the finishing touches

Volunteers' Corner

The following article was sent to me by a past volunteer after taking some time to sit back and reflect on his experiences at Legodimo earlier this year.....



Stitching netting for the carport

'Although I was only working in Legodimo for about a month, I feel as if the whole experience was some kind of long dream. To me it seems amazing that I can board a plane and travel halfway around the world to a place so incredibly foreign compared to my hometown in Massachusetts. It was surreal to see all of the animals that I had only ever seen in photographs and in documentaries on the Discovery Channel, but at the same time the bush felt like home. There was something about the still air that rose above that heated landscape, and how the bush radiated and shimmered with the heat of summer; it felt like being wrapped in a blanket. You could not help but feel immersed in this land, even after climbing to the top of one of the towering hills which rose above the dense foliage. It has been a long time since I felt the brand of excitement which I awoke to everyday while volunteering at this site. The wildlife

which I knew only from media was suddenly all around me, in such stunning variety and number. For someone growing up in a highly developed area, where nature is really quite subdued, to be interacting with an ecosystem such as this within this proximity was the thrill of a lifetime. Simply, it felt as though I had stepped over the fence at the zoo and jumped into the cage

with the animals, only it felt much more natural than that. I was no longer in a place where nature must follow the rules of humans, rather it was the other way around, and I loved every second of it.



Filling sand for hippo barrier

I find myself constantly comparing my daily routine here in Massachusetts with the daily experiences I had in Botswana. In Botswana I would awake just as the sky was beginning to glow with the first rays of sunlight. There was no need to set an alarm or

check my watch, as the calls of the birds and hippos would rouse me from my slumber. I wake up at my college and drag myself out of bed to get ready for another surprisingly dull day amidst concrete, people, and snow/mud/salt. In Legodimo I would jump out of bed, stretch, make tea, and wonder at the glory of nature which was unfolding in front of my very eyes. Here was a place where I felt healthy. The greatest excitement of my situation in Botswana was the capacity for the unknown, which lay ahead of me. What was going to happen today??



Bird observation at the weir

Who knows what the future holds, but I know that I am on the very edge of it as I graduate from my college this spring. I sincerely hope to work with Projects Abroad again once I make some money, maybe travelling to Thailand for the marine conservation project, as I am pursuing a career in oceanography, and this sounds right up my alley. Projects Abroad is unique as it offers the chance to work with people from all over the globe, which can be extremely entertaining and enlightening for perspective purposes. I think that this interaction which spans international borders is one of the most valuable experiences a person can have, and one that will never cease to educate, no matter what your age. I am really looking forward to the lessons that I am going to learn in the years ahead, and I hope that I can do something productive for our world seeing as I have the opportunity to do so.'

David Bouck – 03/01/09-29/01/09



David back at home re-creating his time in Africa with a slight 'snowy' difference

Waterhole Update.....

Once the new waterhole was complete and full of refreshing cool water the volunteers were keen to sit in the hide and see if any animals had started to make use of all their hard work. As you can see from the photo below it is a great success!



Sighting of the Month.....



01/05/2009 - On the way to their hide to engage in an observation session the volunteers came across a Spotted Hyena in the road. The Hyena was in no rush to move out the way thus giving everybody a great chance to see the creature and take some cracking photos. Then to their surprise the hyena moved closer to the vehicle seeming very inquisitive.

Local News & Updates

Mammal Profile.....

Leopard – *Panthera Pardus*

♂ wt - 20-82 Kg

♀ wt - 17-35 Kg

Age – up to 20 years



- **Appearance** – a very beautiful, powerful and stealthy cat; long & low slung body with short muscular limbs, wide head & powerful jaw. It is light golden brown in colour with spots grouped into rosettes on torso and upper limbs and solid black spots on legs, flanks, hindquarters & head.
- **Social/Mating System** – Solitary cat that hunts and lives alone associating with another adult only long enough to mate. Mating is brief and secretive, by comparison with the noisy public coupling of lions. Females and possibly males have overlapping home ranges, while actively defending core areas as exclusive territories. They mark their territories with urine, droppings and scratching trees. Male home ranges may overlap those of several females.
- **Feeding** – the Prince of Stealth! Leopards stalk their prey with infinite patience and in complete silence, trying to get within 5yds of its prey before pouncing, taking it completely by surprise. A leopard will quit within 50yds if it misses despite being able to accelerate up to 60kph. They are extremely strong; can pull down and get a stranglehold on a 136Kg animal and carry a 65Kg Impala up a tree. Leopards have the most varied diet of the cats in this area and will eat anything from insects, reptiles, birds and rodents up to large antelope.
- **Reproduction** – un-seasonal, with 1-3 cubs per litter after a gestation period of 90-100 days. Females begin breeding from 2 years old with 2 year intervals between litters. Cubs are hidden for 6 weeks in dense thickets, caves or hollow trees and moved periodically. They open their eyes in 6-10days and are weaned as early as 3 months but are dependant for at least a year. Offspring become independent at 22 months but remain within natal home range for some months and often receive maternal hand-outs while struggling to become proficient hunters.
- **Relations with other Predators** - ranked just above the cheetah in the predator peck order although it is unknown as to why a leopard will allow a hyena to steal a kill or chase it up a tree being larger & stronger than most hyena's.

New Volunteers this month.....

Raul Duipmanns, Rebecca Linnell, Sarah Windsor, Mirko Kuepper, Clarisse Fahrtmann, Prisca Massa Bernucci, Alexandre Rochard and Kelsie Diperna
See you all soon! We hope you'll have a fantastic experience with us!!

Volunteers Leaving this month...

David Rademaker, Daan Menken, Jolien Klitsie, Pia Sieg, Sonja Larsen, Bart De Beer, Averil Parent, Stella Groenhof and Yukari Takeuchi
Thankyou for all your hard work at the reserve, we really couldn't do a lot of the work we do here without your help!

Farewell.....

The end of May 2009 sees the departure of myself and Jamie from Legodimo Nature Reserve. On a personal note we would like to thank all the volunteers over the past year for all their hard work and contribution to some great memories!