



Sighting of the month: A chameleon on the road, by G

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Dumela!

We have had a very busy month with new projects, new staff, and of course new volunteers. It has been a little challenging, as the weather also started to turn colder near the end of the month, but we are very happy with what we achieved – can you believe we started and finished a major project in just the one month! Of course we also continued with our many different conservation activities, with a few interesting visits and celebrations along the way.

Winter is approaching, and with it the chance to see a little more wildlife as the animals look for reliable water sources, so living by the river should provide us with good viewing opportunities, so we are looking forward to it, even though we will be needing many more layers to keep warm.

As always we would be delighted to hear from any of you, whether you will be arriving here soon, or have already left, if you would like to know more about any of our projects, wildlife, people, or even just a little more about life in the bush of Southern Africa, please just let us know.

Take care and best wishes



Sunrise at Legodimo

Feature: The River Blind

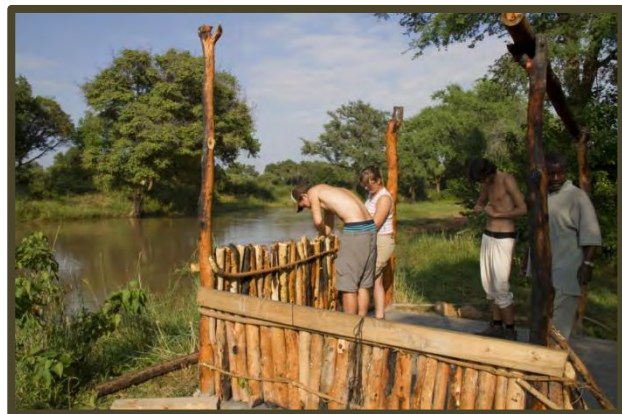
NEW BLIND

The camp at Legodimo is a wonderful place, but when you want to get away from people for a while there are not many places to go. Camp rules are designed for the safety of all volunteers and for this we need to know that all volunteers, unless out on an activity with a staff member, are within 100m of camp. There is a place to sit on the island just in front of the camp, also the football pitch out the back if a team could be put together, but we decided that something more was needed. This month we started (and finished) a beautiful new blind down by the river just to the south west of the main camp.



We started with the concrete base set with 4 thick Mopani poles to support the structure...

Followed by smaller Mopani poles wired together to make the sides...



Then the roof was built with lala palm leaves in between 2 layers of chicken wire (to ensure the vervet monkeys don't destroy it)...



A few finishing touches were added.....

And finally...with the hard work put in by all of our volunteers and staff it was completed in a very short time and provides a peaceful place to sit and contemplate, and to watch some of the local wildlife.



News & Updates

THE NEW GAMEVIEWER!

Legodimo has this month become the proud owner of a new landrover gameviewer. The number of volunteers here is steadily increasing and with Bertha (one of the Toyotas) in and out of the garage for repairs we have been in need of an extra car. G and Mieke spent a week down in Pretoria searching for a suitable vehicle, and we were greeted one Friday when we crossed the border into South Africa by G sitting there in the landrover. It is a beautiful car and perfect for our needs, suitable for game drives, trips into the nearby town for a social, and even supply trips to the city. This will make the next few months much easier to manage as with all three cars we can vary our work schedule a little more, taking groups of volunteers to different parts of the reserve or to visit other places in South Africa or Botswana.



WATERHOLE

The new waterhole at the northern end of the Long Loop was completed this month, and we were so glad to finish! Most of the digging had been done during the end of the wet season (and the rains were very late this year) so the ground had been relatively soft. Our last digging session, however, took place after almost 3 weeks without rain so the ground in the middle of the waterhole was almost like concrete, and incredibly difficult to remove. We had to just level out the bottom, restore the sides which had collapsed due to elephants walking on them, and dig the channel leading down from the borehole, ready for the



installation of the water pump next month.

As soon as we get the pump up and running we hope to build a hide here: as this is situated in a part of the reserve not commonly visited, we should get some nice sightings here, especially as we move on into the dry season. It looks awesome so far, so we'll let you know how things go.

CACTUS

Many of you who have been here this year, and in previous years will remember one of the hardest jobs that we do here – removing the invasive cactus, 'Queen of the Night'. After building up a pile over 3-4 months and waiting for it to dry out, we finally got round to burning it. All of the volunteers and staff were out there piling up dead branches at the sides and on top of the pile to help it burn, also feeding the fire constantly so it would keep going. We worked right through until nearly lunch time, then upon checking it the next day found that we had managed to burn about half of the pile. While it doesn't sound like much it is a big achievement, taking into consideration the amount of soil which was in the pile also (it doesn't burn very well!) and leaves us with more space to build up the pile again. Digging up the cactus is very hard work, trying to avoid the many barbed spines while trying to remove all the roots and fruits to ensure it doesn't start growing again in the same place, so we'd like to say a huge thank you to all the volunteers who have helped us out with this.

NURSERY WORK

The greenhouse which was built a couple of months ago has been put to very good use. We now have a large number of fever tree seedlings, a species which is a favourite of elephants, and also about 60 *Hoodia* seedlings have germinated: this is a very rare cactus so we are delighted to have these. As we move through May the weather has been turning a lot colder, especially early mornings and late evenings so we spent several days in the greenhouse preparing the plants for winter.

All the new seedlings have been removed from the germination beds and replanted in small bags of soil with mulch on the top to try and protect them from the cold. Also we have reorganised the now-empty beds to make them easier to tend and they have been edged with recycled beer bottles placed upside



down, something of which we had a huge supply from litter collections along the roads. The greenhouse is not just for germinating endangered plants, we also grow some vegetables for use in the camp and to date have enjoyed several helpings of fresh spinach. Also there are carrots and beetroot but they are not yet fully grown so we are still waiting.....

CHEETAH TRACKING

This month the first trip was quite memorable as one group of volunteers managed to get their car stuck in mud for a couple of hours...



LION VIEWING

After trying almost the whole month to arrange a lion tracking trip to Venetia (and failing), we found a new place not far away where volunteers could watch a pride being fed, and fighting over that food! While we did love visiting Venetia this new place brings you a lot closer to the lions (although not too close) so we plan to visit again soon.



CLEARING THE BRIDGE

The rains finished very late this year, right at the end of April in Legodimo, but it seems that in other places they carried on for a little longer as the river level instead of dropping was on the increase! By the 2nd week in May the river level had risen over the bridge again, to just over knee level. Now this is no problem in the land cruisers, especially for our staff who know the bridge very well, but it did cause a few problems with some people who wanted to pass through and had never done it before. The water level continued to rise throughout the next week, even at Legodimo the river rose over the banks a little, so this resulted in the Botswana Border Post sensibly closing the bridge at Platjan, our normal crossing point, for a couple of weeks. Our alternatives were to drive to Pont drift (2 hours away) and take the pontoon across, or drive to Martin's Drift (5 hours away on very rough roads) and back around on the other side. G tried the road to Martin's

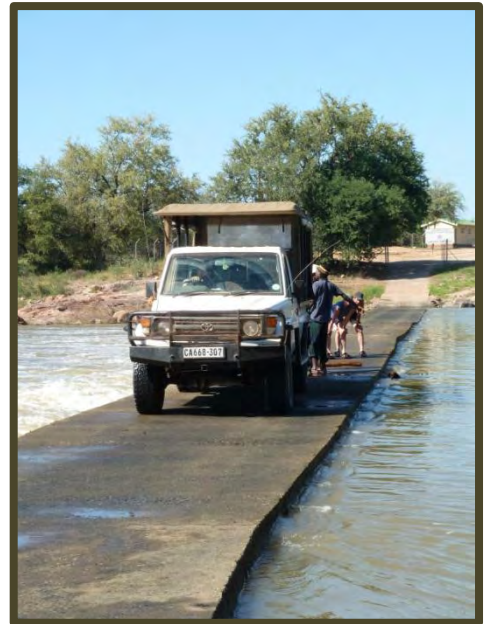


Drift and decided that this would just damage the cars, so we had to go to Pont Drift. The drive there, while a little long, is through the beautiful countryside of the Tuli Block, and afforded us some wonderful sightings of giraffe and zebras.



When the river level started to drop the border patrol were reluctant to open the bridge until it was completely clear of water, but they called us one day when the water was just ankle deep: if we were willing to help them clear the bridge of driftwood

d then they would reopen it. At this news we gathered all our staff and volunteers and headed on down to Platjan, working away for 2 hours to remove all the trapped logs from the upriver side of the bridge. This cleared the tunnels and by the time we were finished the water level had dropped to about 10cm below the bridge! We received many thank you's from our neighbours around Legodimo, having enabled everyone to pass freely over the border again.



BIRTHDAYS!

Two of our volunteers this month invited us to join them in the experience of a lifetime – celebrating their birthdays in the African bush! Thomas and Axelle provided us with the opportunity to spend the night at Evangelina Game Lodge and much fun was had by all.

Staff Page

This month the Legodimo Conservation Team has undergone a few changes: Sadly we said goodbye to Matt, who decided to return to Johannesburg after nearly 18 months in the bush. But we were joined by 2 new members of staff, Pamela Huxley from the conservation project in Thailand and Rachel Kilby from the Taricaya conservation project, Peru.