



At the site of our latest water project some dig, others construct the dam wall and a few take a chance for a very quick break on a very hot September morning!

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"The Office Wetland" Development

There is a rather beautiful spot here at Legodimo which is referred to as "The Office". Its name comes from the fact that Gerrit (Project Director) and other early staff used to have to drive to this picturesque high point whenever they needed to use the internet. It was the best spot for getting signal and although a bit of a mission, it's a pretty stunning office! Most of the past volunteers will probably remember having watched the sun rise or set here at least once!

At the bottom of this hill is an area where water naturally collects as it runs off the hills. Gerrit and Dave (Conservation Manager) realised its potential as a larger wetland area and set off with some willing volunteers to start making alterations to this area. Currently the water that collects here separates into separate dips and holes.

The plan was to create a dam wall at the lowest point to prevent some of the water running off, instead the intention is that the water will build up and create a natural wetland. Large logs, rocks and earth were collected and used in the construction of this dam. The volunteers then got to work digging into the area in an attempt to create one larger pool by digging the earth out from between the existing separated holes.



It's early days and as with all of these water projects they require many man hours, it is off to a great start though. You can see from the pictures that the dam wall is looking really rather impressive. We are hoping to get this completed before the summer rains arrive so thanks to all the guys who have worked through the heat!

Photographs

Above: After just a morning's hard work collecting logs, branches, rocks and shovelling earth the dam wall was already taking shape

Next Page Top: One of the volunteers –Takashi, shovelling earth between all the wood and rocks. Once the earth is packed down it will help prevent water loss by filling the gaps

Next Page Bottom: As some of the team work on the wall, the others dig behind to make the base for the water basin. It hasn't rained here properly for a good ten months but at the forefront of this picture you can see water has naturally settled from the hills



Volunteers Story

The following article was sent to me by Joel Voillat, a sixteen year old volunteer from France. Joel joined us here at Legodimo for the August two week special program, here is here story.....

London-Heathrow Airport, 9 20PM, the Boeing 747 rose from the tarmac, 11 hours away from Johannesburg and 12 from Polokwane, leaving behind developed Europe to an authentic continent, Africa. After the long and painful day travelling we landed in Polokwane Airport. The other volunteers and I were impatient to start the project monitored by Projects Abroad. Projects Abroad is an organization giving the chance to everyone to volunteer in different countries for different things. This project consisted in conserving nature in Legodimo natural reserve in South Africa and Botswana. During my two week stay I did chores such as fence removal, road clearing, construction of waterhole etc...

After a long day of travelling and three harsh hours in a roofless Land Rover we arrived at the Legodimo natural reserve camp. We were warmly welcomed before being served a typical African meal. The rest of the evening was spent mixing with the other volunteers. We were truly the only ones out there; the next sign of civilization was an hour's drive away. The winter South African sky was packed with powerful stars, nothing like the European one. The whole group went to bed quite early in our separate, electricity deprived dorms.

Three groups had been created to distribute the work; I was part of the two-week group called Kwalata. The first days at Legodimo were spent digging for a new elephant waterhole (a drinking spot) and research driving. Apart from the breathtaking scenery experienced at every drive, the animals were quite scarce: nothing much was spotted beside impala's and bushbucks (sorts of antelopes). As we started working early in the morning, the afternoon activities commenced only at three o'clock because of the sun's zenith. These hours were chill hours where the whole Legodimo camp laid low. Some were reading in the shade, others taking a nap but at all time the life of the bush could be heard. Gerrit, the project director did an impressive snake demo for the group. He was handling snakes while explaining how dangerous, aggressive or venomous they were. He also explained that he had once been bitten by a black mamba: a terrifying four meter snake that has venom so powerful it shuts down your neuron system. After this full adrenaline moment volunteers were dismissed and dispatched in their respective groups.

The following days were mostly hard and rushed work. A Projects Abroad employee was coming to the camp the weekend and the only shelter left was an unfinished tool shed. We spent much time cutting down branches with machetes and weaving the sticks. On occasional drives through the bush we had the chance to spot a few elephants and zebras. Despite the elephant's huge volume and body weight they are very discreet animals. A dozen elephants can be moving around hidden a few meters away and there is no chance to notice them. After intense working days a rest was well earned. Gerrit organized for the volunteers to go to "Alldays", a modest little town two hours drive on the South African side to spend the night at the hotel. Everyone had an enjoyable evening partying and making the most out of electricity and warm water. My first week in "Paradise" (Tswana for Legodimo) was truly delightful. Here on the tip of Africa we are so far away from the Europe and its unhealthy stressful way of life. In Legodimo we are constantly in communion with nature and following its rhythm, mornings rising with the sun and the bush's inhabitants, at nights sleeping with sundown, with thousands of stars to look upon us. The ambient climax is a world's difference from the one at home. Out in the bush, walking on the thin, blood red sand, it is nature and its laws ruling upon us.

After a nice rest in 'Alldays' hotel we returned back at camp and started work again. The officer from London had arrived and was enjoying his room in the genuine tool shed. In the following days we did much animal observing, both bird and blind observation. For bird observation we stationed on a rock in the middle of the Legodimo river and spread seeds that had collected beforehand. The birds on that day were quite sparse and we still could see kingfishers and other various birds. Blind observation, even in this idyllic context can be quite boring. It consists in hiding in a hut with thin blinds and watching the animals drink from the waterhole. We spent 40 straight minutes waiting but seeing nothing other than a few impalas. I spent some time reading an enjoyable book by James Joyce. One day, while we were digging the new waterhole, two herds of elephants came to drink. We rushed to the Land Rovers as 100 elephants approached the waterhole. It was astounding being surrounded by so many elephants of different ages. Big males jostled and baby elephants stayed around their protective mother. We were delightfully stuck for about one hour while dusk, light shone beautifully off the elephants.

The last day in Legodimo was amazing but also sad. We spent the day tree wrapping. This activity consists in wrapping wire, collected from fence removal, around trees damaged by the elephants. On the way to tree wrapping a herd of impalas glided across the road a few meters away from us. At that moment I felt like it was my home, walking through the wilderness in total harmony with the animals. On Friday I was the first to leave Legodimo. The good-byes were extremely painful and in a few instants I was already on the plane back to Europe, leaving behind authentic Africa and going into modernity, nothing authentic.



Photographs

Top Right and left: Joel (pictured centre with the white shirt) digging away at Warthog dam
Bottom: Joel (pictured here on the far left) seen here with a panga that he used for chopping branches for the construction of the shed walls

Sighting of the month

Leopard-*Panthera pardus* 14/09/2009

It's been four months since any of our lucky volunteers have seen one of these magnificent creatures, so it was about time really that this very illusive cat showed up. The very lucky lot set off on a research drive one morning and within half an hour they happened upon a leopard crossing the road before them. This snap was taken by one of our volunteers – Anna Pasternack.



Waterhole Update

Here at Legodimo we are on our own little mission to have plenty of water sites ready in preparation for the summer rains. The rains are likely to start from late October onward. The reason we so desperately want to be able to collect it is because when you find water you generally will find animals too! Where we are located does not really have many decent sized natural water spots so we have been giving nature a little helping hand. We have several methods...

1) A man made waterhole is created from scratch near a drill site. A drill site is a place where machinery has been brought in to drill deep into the earth. A pump is attached to bring the water up. Nearby an area is dug out of the earth and will be cemented or left to provide a more natural look!

2) Occasionally you come across areas that naturally always seem to hold a bit of water, often collecting at the base of hills. If we are able to develop upon this we will. The trick being to create a system so that we reduce water being lost and maximise upon the amount of water that stays put! The method depends upon each area and where the water is being lost from.

To give you a better idea here are some pictures of the work that goes on when making a hole and the finished articles!

Elephant Hide Dam



Warthog Dam



Camp Waterhole



Mammal Profile and General Update

Mammal Profile.....

Mammal Profile.....

African Elephant – *Loxodonta Africana*

Weight ♂: 2,800 -3,200kg ♀: 1,800 – 2,500 kg

Age: ± 60 years



- **Social/ Mating System** – Herds are led by a matriarch, the matriarch is chosen automatically as she will be the most experienced. Herds consist of females of all ages and young males. Once a bull (male) elephant reaches puberty (10 – 14 years) he will be forced from the herd by the older cows. Bulls generally live alone but may occasionally come together with other lone males. When the males enter musth (signifying readiness to mate) they follow the herds with breeding females.
- **Feeding** – An elephant's digestive system is simple and the majority of their diet is grass. However they also eat leaves, roots, bark, fruits and seeds. Adult male bulls eat between 180kg and 270kg of food every day.
- **Reproduction** – When an adult bull is ready to mate he enters a process called musth - this can be identified by secretions from glands either side of the head and dribbling between the back legs which have quite a powerful odour. Lone males go in search of herds with females that are ready to mate. The gestation period of an elephant is 22 months. It is very rare that more than one offspring be produced. They do not have a breeding season and will breed throughout the year. Adult females will produce a calf about every 5 years.
- **Facts** – Elephants have six sets of molars, each lasting approximately 10 years. Once all the teeth have been used the elephant will not survive long after as it is unable to eat!

Volunteers Leaving in October...

Thank you for all your hard work at the reserve, we really couldn't do a lot of the work we do here without your help!

Sabrina Colquhoun, Alexandre Rochard, Margaux Christine Boels, Anna Pasternack and Chris Fischer

New Volunteers in October.....

See you all soon! We hope you'll have a fantastic experience with us!!

Chris Fischer, Mie Jonsson, Silke radmacher, Hannah Kinsman and Emilienne Tavernier, Sebastian van Lare

And Finally...

Hello,

This month has seen the completion of the greenhouse frame. For those of you who don't know the greenhouse was developed to grow and safely house indigenous plants that are disappearing from the area. The plan being to eventually reintroduce them to the reserve. Now that the frame is complete - the planting can begin.

Our resident porcupine Brian had been away for a while but she returned with a bang by raiding the cupboards, breaking our brand new fridge and keeping the boys up all night with her kitchen raids for four nights in a row!!! We all have a huge soft spot for Brian but after 4 days of little sleep, the boys were looking slightly crazed and were pretty fed up of having to chase porcupines from the kitchen at 2, 3, 4am. Luckily with some crafty amendments to the kitchen her antics were put to an end, she seems to be happy with the dinner scraps and a very occasional break in.

The temperature is very noticeably on the rise so the volunteers are heading out earlier in the mornings and later in the afternoons. We look forward to what Spring will bring as all the seasons bring us something new and wonderful to see and experience.

As always, please keep any stories of your time at Legodimo coming in and I can feature them in the newsletters.

Thanks for reading!

Kathy

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