

Earthwatch Scavengers of South African Field Newsletter for the 2011 Teams

January Team



Earthwatch, January team was an international team with volunteers from Japan, Canada, UK and the U.S. which made for very interesting conversation around the dinner table. Despite the wide range in age everyone got on extremely well. The research objectives for this team were to complete a camera trapping session at Mankwe and at Pilanesberg, all data collected from this survey is going towards Louisa's PhD.



We also had to complete 21 spotlight transects at Mankwe and at Pilanesberg National Park which involved many long nights but was well worth it as the sightings were excellent.



This team were a great help in completing 7 habitat assessments, the data collected from these assessments are going towards Louis's vulture research. .



Whilst conducting all the research the team was hard at work planning a conservation day for Lerome Secondary School, all the volunteers had brought stationery and gifts for the children and they put alot of effort into planning various fun activites to firstly create conservation awareness and secondly to educate the children about the cultures of their countries. This resulted in these young teens having an enriched experience and in return the volunteers got to interact with the scholars and learn about their cultures. In true African tradition the school children thanked the volunteers by singing and dancing.



Team 1 June 2011



Team 1

Team 1 was an exceptionally small team but it was essential that the team went ahead as we had to complete a camera trapping session in Pilanesberg for Louisa and Rob needed assistance with his Jackal research. We were very fortunate in that the 3 volunteers that arrived were enthusiastic and ready to go as they had to do the work of 6 people.

The camera trapping was highly successful with hyena on all cameras in Pilanesberg including Carol our collared hyena. Many other interesting creatures visited the cameras.

Pilanesberg Cameras



Mankwe Cameras



Many management objectives were achieved, the volunteers removed snares whilst on an anti poaching patrol, they recorded large mammal species on a walked transect and helped burn a fire break.



There were also a few amusing moments e.g when Paul decided to try and break the Guinness book of records with the amount of pudding he could fit on his plate and when Penga the warthog tried to give Rob a big hug.



Personally I was touched by Lucy's passion to stop the rhino poaching. She helped me set up a blog and has put up anti rhino poaching signs in the Natural History Museum in London. This shows that when you are passionate enough about something you can make a difference.



Team 2 July

Team 2 was an award winning team, these boys were selected by Earthwatch to join our project. It became very clear in a short period of time why these boys had been chosen. They had the most enquiring minds of any team that has ever visited Mankwe, they were keen to learn as much as possible about every aspect of research and the management of the reserve. The boys were chaperoned by James from Earthwatch .

The main objectives for team 2 was to complete as many latrine transects as possible and to repeat as many spotlight transects as they could. They proved to be competent on both accounts and beat the record for finding the most latrines in one transect in one afternoon. They were so determined to beat the record that we continued on into the night using flash lights.



They were rewarded for their hard work on spotlight transects by seeing a brown hyena right next to the car



They were also a great help to Rob in setting cameras at 7 sights at Mankwe, black backed jackals visited all sites which is what Rob was hoping for.

In a feed back session at the end of their stay they said the best activity was burning the firebreaks, there was great excitement when Jason rescued a 4 m python from the flames and carried it to safety.



Team 3 and 4 August 2011

Teen Team



August saw the arrival of our 5th teen team, they were very enthusiastic and seemed to get on well with each other from the start. This team was chaperoned by Penny Reese who is from South Africa and has much experience in dealing with teens. Fortunately the teens were enthusiastic and extremely efficient with all the scientific equipment . They were also highly competitive which meant that when we set them an objective they would want to beat it, which is a highly productive way to work.

They had the daunting task of trying to finish 7 transects in Pilanesberg and at Mankwe, their goal was to beat the existing latrine record set by the June team. This was achieved on their 3rd day and great fun was had by all.



31 spotlight transects were completed which is the highest number done by a single team and there were pages and pages of data to be entered into the computer, camera traps were set at 7 sites but what a sense of achievement when it was all done.



The teens were very involved in the management practices at Mankwe as it is a very busy time of the year. They assisted us with a large block burn, conducted anti poaching patrols and helped record large mammal species on a large mammal transect.



This team said the highlight for them was a visit to a local school, it was so pleasing to see how the children interacted with the teens. During this visit to The Holy Family School in Mogwase a relationship was established and we plan to invite 4 teams a year to Mankwe for a conservation day and to help the school set up a wildlife and environmental programme.



Team 5



Team 5 was also a relatively small group with a great deal of research objectives to meet, once again we were fortunate to have a team that wanted to be kept busy and be involved in all aspects of our research.

The main objective for this team was to complete the 8 latrine transects left to do in Pilanesberg and Mankwe, this involved many hours of scat spotting which the volunteers soon became very good at.



Their patience and dedication was rewarded by conducting call ins, which is always very exciting as absolutely anything can respond to the call of a squealing pig. The success rate this year was much higher than last year. We had 6 hyena come into call ins and a record number of Hyaena sightings, 10 in total, including 2 at Mankwe, which was extremely exciting for the Mankwe staff. I think all will remember Louis's shouts of joy when we spotted a Hyaena at a new den on the way back from sundowners on the last night! Team 3 seemed to have the luck of the Irish, their sightings included leopard, 7 wild dogs, a vine snake and several lions



Many hours were also spent setting up camera traps and then entering all the data into the new data base.

Team 5 also got involved in the management activities namely controlled burning, anti poaching and large mammal transects



Definitely a highlight for team 5 was watching a herd of elephants at a water hole while we ate lunch at Bakabung lodge on the day off.



Team 6 October 2011



Team 6 arrived to scorching temperatures and a very dry spell at Mankwe but fortunately they brought rain and broke the dry spell. The hot weather did not affect the energy levels of this vibrant team which was made up of 6 extremely strong ladies and Wolfgang. From the very first evening the conversation around the dinner table was deafening and much laughter was heard. This atmosphere continued through out the team which made working with team 6 a great pleasure.

The focus for this team was to do an extensive camera trapping survey at Pilanesberg and Mankwe, this was achieved with much success with Brown Hyaena captured at 7 out of 9 sites, and the volunteers were also rewarded with photos of aardvark, lion, honey badger and many other species.



36 spotlight transects were completed with species such as serval, caracal, lion, leopard, aardwolf and brown Hyena recorded.



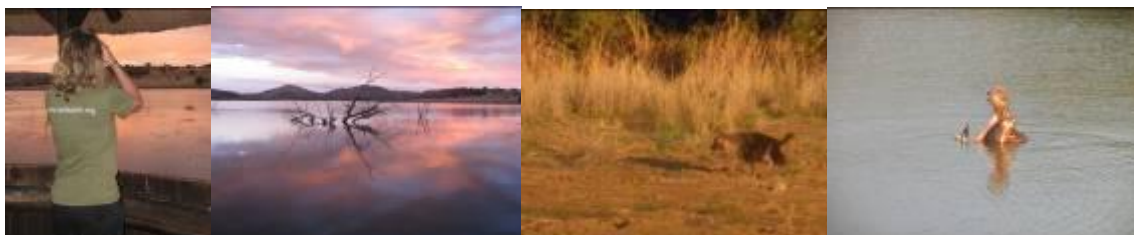
Team 6 were also involved with the vulture research, they spent 3 hours observing a carcass and making behavioural observations.



They also completed 2 habitat assessments for Louis and walked 11km's under the powerlines to check for birds that had collided with the electricity lines.



The highlight for this team were the picnic dinners at the hides, the sunsets at this time of year are spectacular and the volunteers were treated to a rare sighting of a brown Hyena coming down to the dam to drink.





The most exciting sighting to come out of this expedition was the sighting of 2 black footed cat kittens, they have never been positively identified in this area of South Africa and as they are a red list species and extremely rare we were ecstatic to spot them on the way back from sundowners on the last night. Louis managed to get good photographs and a GPS location and this has now been entered in to the NW Nature Conservation inventory. The presence of these rare cats may give us more power to stop future development at Mankwe. Well done team !!!!

Team 7 November 2011



Team 7 consisted of 6 volunteers from the U.K and U.S, this included Lutz who is a returning volunteer.

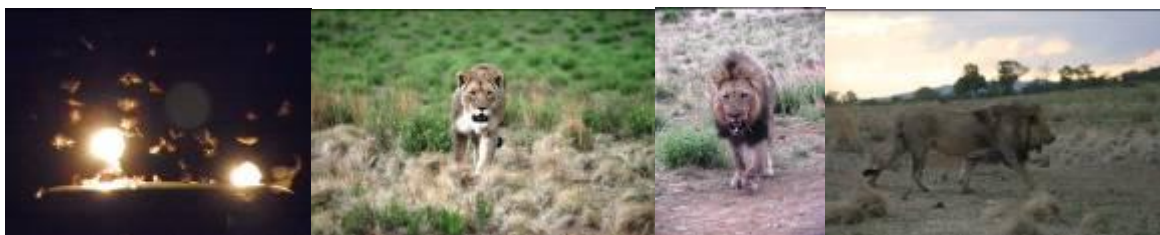
We were all excited about this team as it was our first 'dung beetle' team led by Anja Rott. The main objective for this team was to do an extensive pit fall survey at Mankwe. This involved going out early in the morning to look for fresh large mammal droppings to put in the pit fall traps. Many animals were spotted on our early morning walks and volunteers eagerly chased dung beetles to find the precious pile of dung. Once all the dung had been collected the volunteers returned to camp to dig the holes for the traps.



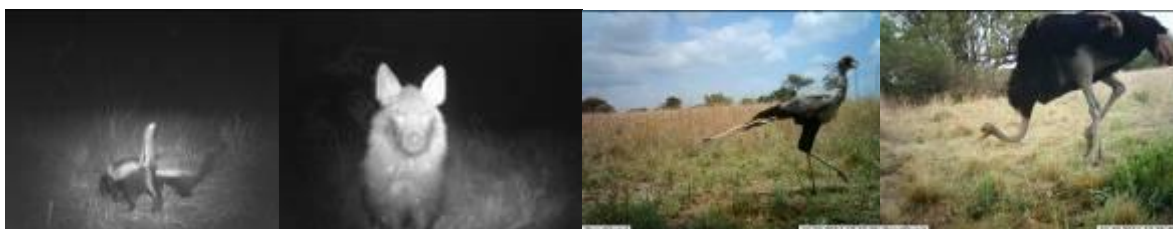
The traps were collected in some hours later and the dung beetles were carefully extracted, identified and recorded. This survey was done during the day and then repeated at night and we found a marked difference in the species that were active at night compared to during the day.



Team 7 also completed 14 spotlight transects at Mankwe and in the Pilanesberg National Park, the highlight of the spotlighting was witnessing a pride of lion kill a zebra. Once the zebra was dead the lioness went to collect her cubs and the lions stayed on their kill for the next 3 days. This team also had the privilege of recording 3 brown hyaena on their transects.



7 camera traps were set across Mankwe with a lot of success, once again there were black backed jackal on all cameras and a brown hyena visited one of the cameras. There were also some very unexpected visitors!



Wow what a year !!! 7 teams, 47 volunteers from all over the world. It has been a pleasure getting to know you. I wish all the teens that are embarking on their university careers all the very best, you are all incredible people and just the fact that you chose to spend your summer holiday helping a conservation project tells me that you will be successful in whatever you do. Thank you to all the volunteers that spent endless hours looking for scat, spotlighting until late at night and pulling smelly guts to camera traps, your efforts are greatly appreciated by all the scientists involved and especially the scavengers that are often forgotten. Without your support and interest none of this would be possible.

I would like to thank all the staff that have helped me with the teams Dougal, Louis, Lauren, Anja, Rob, Penny, Louisa, Wikus and Jason you guys have been amazing. We wish Louis all the best with his future in the U.K, he will be sorely missed on the project as he has assisted with nearly all the teams , his help with bait, data collation, hours of driving and general input into the project over the past 5 years is sincerely appreciated.

All the analysis and planning that is done by Dawn and Richard are the essence of the project so carry on sending us our objectives and may the project grow from strength to strength. Thanks to you both.

I am looking forward to the 2012 teams may they be as interesting and fun as the 2011.

We look forward to another productive year in 2011 and to another great bunch of volunteers.

All the best Lynne, Rik, Dawn, Louis and Dougal