



Lentswe

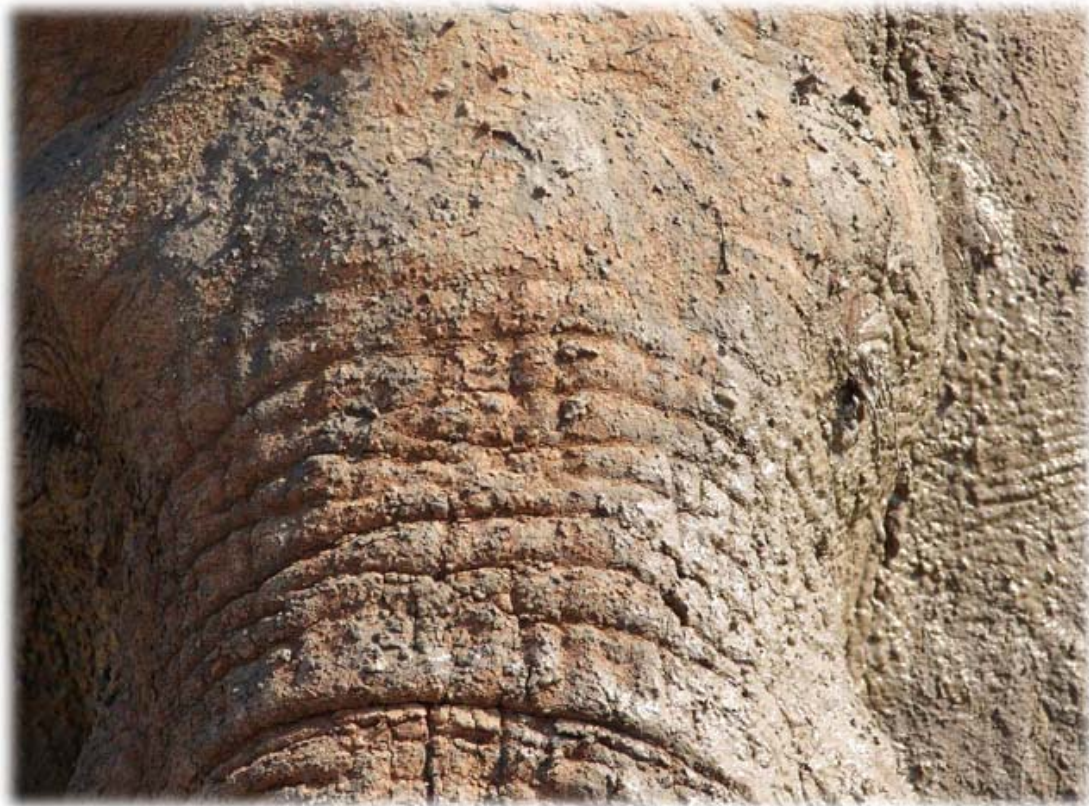
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Madikwe

A NEWSLETTER FOR AND BY THE MADIKWE GAME RESERVE STAKEHOLDERS

OCTOBER

2008



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EDITORIAL

I must admit, writing this month's editorial seemed like a daunting task to me. Probably because Lentswe is already two weeks late due to power failures and other technological failures such as e-maillessness!

So yesterday for inspiration I locked my office door behind me, even though my in-tray was still filled to the brim and in fact overflowing with papers about staff issues, lodge issues, people waiting for me to respond to minor issues and major issues. While closing the door I pushed that part of my conscience that said I should rather stay in the office and work my way through the paper mountain through the crack in the door and locked it solidly.

I first went to Thukudu dam and there after to my usual spot of reflection. (I cannot disclose the location of this spot due to obvious reasons!) And as always, sitting under a tree between the earth and the sky the wind blew all the cobwebs left by park politics out of my head. So in summary—this was my train of thought:

The end of 2008 is rapidly approaching and 2009's dawn is already visible on the horizon. Reflection during this time of year comes naturally to me and I started thinking about the past year. If someone had to ask me about

the highlights of the past year it seems at first as distorted and unclear as the reflections of the dead tree stumps in Thukudu dam. We neither increased our income significantly nor did we increase the land incorporated into the park. We also did not save any endangered species from the brink of extinction.

Then it dawned on me that we have been contributing significantly to conservation. No ways, you might say. Madikwe has not been proclaimed for conservation but for tourism and communities and for creating economic growth, conservation is only a spin-off benefit... I would beg to differ.

Natural Capital and the investment there off is not a new concept. Living sustainable means that you do not live of natural capital but live of the natural income. In Madikwe we might say that the natural capital are all the natural resources such as game, vegetation, soil and other as well as the natural processes that takes place, not only on a scale that is visible to us but also on a much smaller scale. We are contributing to the carbon cycle, we are contributing to the nitrogen cycle through nitrogen binding bacteria on the root systems of Acacia's. We are conserving a system that allows for the flow of energy through various species in food

chains and eventually decomposing important nutrients back into the system. How do you put a value to trees absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen back into the air. That is natural income that are created on a daily basis and that we cannot put a value to. I guess you can say that Madikwe is not a forest and its contribution on a global scale is insignificant, but if we are going to take that stance we will only conserve huge ecosystems and there are not a lot of those left. So in my view our contribution is of extreme importance on a landscape, ecosystem and species level.

We have contributed to the management of lions through the movement of lions to areas country wide that assisted in the management of lion genetics, we have contributed to the management of the wild dogs through our input into the Wild dog Action group (WAG) and we have protected our white and black rhino population which also led to increase in population size of these animals.

Is conservation in Madikwe of any real importance? I believe it is, we just sometimes tend to forget!

On that note, enjoy this two week late edition of Lentswe!
PS: Due to further technological failures Lentswe is now two months late! Enjoy anyway!
 The Editor

LETTERS

We had a surprise visitor a few weeks back. We woke up one morning to find a large bird sitting on the roof of the staff canteen and a debate between the guides followed as to what it could be. It turned out to be a juvenile Ground Hornbill, which are not endemic to the area and so was a real treat for some of the staff as they had never seen one before. Being able to see one at such close quarters became even more of a privilege for many when it was pointed out that they're an endangered species.

Later in the morning, we got a call from the manager of the Madikwe Land Owners Association to our north, asking if we have seen his hornbill. It turns out that he has two juveniles that he is raising and one of them took off and ended up at our lodge.

We were unable to catch it, and found it sitting on the same roof again the next morning. Fortunately the hornbill took a liking to Kabelo, our maintenance man, and through gentle clicking sounds, he managed to coax the bird into following him into the cage that it had tried so hard to avoid the previous day.

Colin got his hornbill back and we had a first hand experience with a "Lifer".

Regards,
Carmen.

Have you seen my bruises...

Weapons of any kind have never ever thrilled me, in fact, when I am Queen, I'm going to ban any form of violent combat - quite how this is going to happen was still in the

planning stages, and after a game or two of paintball - a solution!

Ok, so it is a little violent - we have all bruises in colours that rival the shades of pellets we shot with, but it's SUCH fun and with the enthusiasm shown

by the usual suspects, hopefully a recurring event. Many thanks to Kevin Linforth for organising Barry to come up from Zeerust with great equipment - us girls were very thankful for the chest protectors!

All the Best
Viki

Cross border cheetah

This story was supposed to run in last months *Lentswe* but because of schedules and work load I never got around to writing it. Nonetheless it's an interesting story and a significant one since the lead player was our very last cheetah.

On the morning of the 7th of September I received a radio call from Thomas (Cadet Ranger for the Northern Section) that there was a cheetah outside Madikwe and it was collared. My heart sank and initially I thought it must be a mistake but Thomas confirmed that he was watching the animal on the border road as we spoke. Immediately my greatest concern was that the cheetah may cross the small cattle fence that marks the boundary between South Africa and Botswana. If he did then he was as good as lost since I was pretty sure the battery in his radio collar had recently died since I hadn't picked him up in at least a month.

A radio call on Eastern Safari cleared the roads from my house to the location of the cheetah and traveling far in excess of Madikwe's speed limit (it was an emergency) I was soon with Thomas on the border road where sure enough there was our last, lonely cheetah walking along the fence outside Madikwe but at least he hadn't crossed the road to the Botswana side yet, at least

he wasn't walking the cattle fence... yet...

At this point he appeared fairly relaxed and a plan was made to try and push him very slowly along the fence into the open gates of the Mooigenoeg field ranger base (from where we could just open the bases internal gates and heard him back into the reserve) which was about 700 meters ahead. This first plan was meant to keep him relaxed because on checking whether his collar was working I was met with silence. The reassuring beep beep of a working collar transmitting to my receiver was nowhere to be heard and so at least keeping him calm on the Madikwe side of the road meant he might turn into the base when he got there. If he suddenly crossed the road and went through the fence into Botswana without a working collar he was as good as gone. Unfortunately we forgot to tell the cheetah the details of the plan because twice he approached the open gate and turned around, the second time clearly showing signs of fear and anxiety as he now began running back eastwards along the fence. After a few hundred meters he turned around again and headed back west towards the base but stopped short, now hot and tired, to lie up under a tree and cool down.

It has been said again and again that hindsight is always 20/20 and in hindsight

my next decision nearly lost us the cheetah altogether.

With it being evident that he had no intention of going into Mooigenoeg base I made the decision that he would need to be anaesthetized and so a dart was prepared but he was just too far away for a confident darting so I told Thomas to try and push the cheetah slowly towards my vehicle... just a few meters was all that was needed. Bad idea.

The poor animal, still hot and irritated, immediately bolted... straight across the border road and bounced off the cattle fence on the other side of which was Botswana. This was not the first prize scenario and it was with more than a little bit of luck that the dart hit home because the second time he hit the fence, he went straight through, between the strands and now highly mobile north to who knows where?

It doesn't take a lot of imagination to work out that the language used in frustration would make most sailors blush. At least the dart was in and he was going to go down but now the clock was ticking. Funny thing is that Madikwe's last cheetah crossing into Botswana isn't automatic justification for an automatic cross border follow up and so it was off to the Botswana Defense Force base (fortunately only a few hundred meters away) to get permission to follow up.

Cross border cheetah

Unfortunately the soldiers there needed to contact their superiors who then told us to contact the South African Police to escort us. In the interim two BDF soldiers arrived on the scene where the cheetah had crossed and, after being convinced that this cheetah was neither aggressive nor awake, they set off in the direction the cheetah (now long ago out of site) had run.

After a very long thirty minutes or so a member of the SAPS and another member of the BDF arrived and we were told permission had been granted to cross the border and follow up on the cheetah which was done with a huge amount of relief on my side, relief that was unfortunately short lived since we soon lost the spoor and I knew that with every passing minute the drug was wearing off and the chances of finding him became less and less.

More than an hour after the dart had gone in and despondency had descended, I overheard one of the Madikwe field rangers (who had joined us to help track) suggesting we retry the telemetry receiver. I told them that the battery in the collar was dead so it was pointless but that I would give it a try and so I slogged back to the border, to my vehicle where the telemetry receiver was. I took it out, plugged in the antenna, placed the ear phones on my ears and... beep, beep... the glorious sound of a working, but very faint, collar filled my head and so with renewed hope that



Above: Success! Nearly 700m inside Botswana, Madikwe's last cheetah is recovered. Photo: C. vd Berg.

but very faint, collar filled my head and so with renewed hope that our last cheetah was not going to become a permanent guest of our neighbor to the north I set off with one of the SAPS members in the direction from which the signal was coming. After walking for about 700 or so meters we found him, much to my surprise and relief, very much drugged and fast asleep still. Unfortunately he was out in the open and lying in the sun for the past hour had made him very hot so I called for water from the BDF base to pour over him in an attempt to cool him down.

With the help of our Field Rangers and the BDF soldiers we carried him back to the border where he was rather unceremoniously repatriated into South Africa and back to Madikwe on the back of my bakkie.

He was released near Tswasa water hole (with a brand new radio collar) and has subsequently taken up his old roaming pattern which pretty much covers the whole of the reserve.—
Declan Hofmeyr



Above: Repatriation complete and just a few minutes from being released back in Madikwe Photo: C. vd Berg.

Keeping Sane

There is a perception outside of the game reserve world that those of us who work here are all living a wonderful stress free life and, while there is no doubt that some of the stresses of modern living (traffic, crime, pollution) are reduced, the perception of this work being... well... not really work (The "You're so lucky to be living a permanent holiday" type comment that we've all heard) eventually stands all our tempers on end. In Madikwe one of the most frequently heard complaints from the guides, that there are so many people in the reserve and on the roads, has also proven to be the saving grace

of many a sanity since it allows for a relatively active social life. The Madikwe Field Guides Association has also taken it on themselves to organize occasional get togethers with as many guides and staff as possible. Taking it a step further some of the get togethers revolve around an event or competition of some sort which generally ends up being an East vs West competition. In Madikwe the lodges have been developed in nodes so as to allow large areas to remain undeveloped, except for tracks and roads. This has resulted in a friendly rivalry developing between the guides from lodges in the two

hemispheres of the reserve and in the last year, three such competitions have been held.

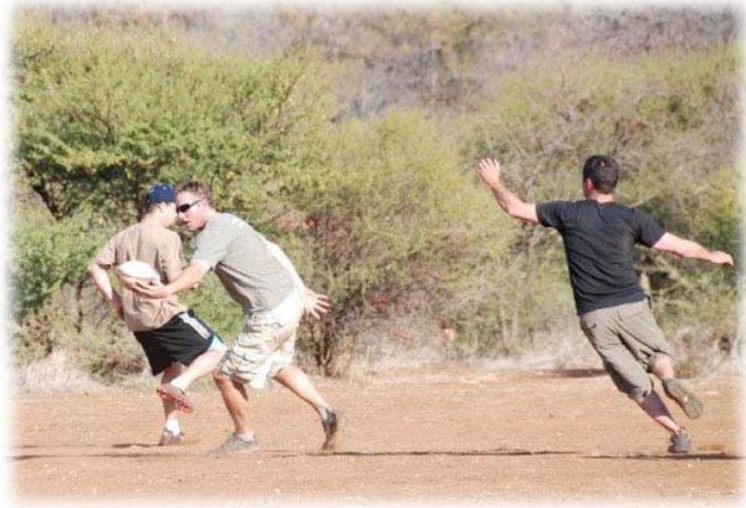
The first was a touch rugby game at Tau Lodge in which the west pummeled the east 9-5 but we vowed to return and make an example of those smug winners (no prizes for guessing which side of the reserve I live on...)

The touch rugby was followed by a mini motorcross event held in a quarry at Deredepoort that Davie Maree had fixed up for us to use. This was a bit of hollow victory because no one from the west turned up, but the East still claims it as win.

KEEPING SANE

Most recently a paintball game was held at Vleischfontein which while resulting in many bruised and injured bodies a winning side was never determined... because... well, no one kept score. So we'll call that one a tie.

With that result it's 1 all. We hope to organize a big paintball game in early December inside one of the bomas and methinks it's about time that touch rugby rematch took place... - D Hofmeyr



Above: In a rare moment of glory for the East, Greg gets the ball and makes a break for it between Roddy and... um... someone else. **Photo:** D. Hofmeyr



Above: In full flight the Derdepoort GATSIEN MX track. **Photo:** D. Hofmeyr



Above: Bruised, battered and splattered, the troops return from battle. **Photo:** N. Fischer

JACKAL PROJECT

In the August news letter we discussed just how difficult it has been to dart jackal in Madikwe or anywhere for that matter! A darted jackal in your hand is like gold and if per chance the jackal is a territorial animal it's a real bonus!!

This addition I will relate some of the more interesting histories surrounding just a few of the radio collared jackals in Madikwe. We must start with J11 the first Madikwe jackal to be darted and radio collared. All radio collars prior to this were introductions who will be discussed at a later stage

The J11 male was the mate and partner of the female J5 one of only 4 out of 12 successful jackal introductions into Madikwe. J5 is regularly seen around the eastern airstrip which is her core area and the vicinity where she has had 2 litters of pups over the last 4 years.

We desperately needed to dart J11 to complete the family picture so to speak. This was obviously easier said than done as back in 2004 we did not have the darts described in the August Newsletter. For two years J11 did not at any time present us with an opportunity to dart him he was extremely wary of approaching the bakkie to a darting distance, even at carcass, and then a plan came to me, a plan based on jackal behaviour, a plan that was our only chance.

Jackals are very territorial and a pair will limit jackal numbers moving through their territory to a minimum, in fact core areas are seldom penetrated by other jackals. But a jackal is never so protective over his core area and his female as he is during the oestrus of the female. A jackal male is indeed so protective over his female during oestrus that he watches and controls her every move for the week surrounding the oestrus period. In effect he "holds" her "captive" and restricts her movements and contacts with other jackals..

J5 had been habituated to approach the bakkie to close quarters by using a certain whistle and placing a small piece of chicken in the vehicle headlights, an option I used to assess her condition and general status from time to time like pregnancy for example..

I had noticed that during 2004 her male J11 would also approach the bait into the bakkie headlights but only during the one week within her oestrus period. He would become so besotted with J5 that he would throw all caution to the wind. This was to be our only opportunity. At all other times when I baited J5 J11 would linger in the penumbra of the headlights but he would never approach the vehicle. So during July 2005 I monitored J5 every night over a certain period to assess her oestrus status. Finally it happened I baited her and she came into

and she came into the headlights of the bakkie to retrieve the small piece of chicken followed by an overprotective and highly aggressive mate...J11.

The next day I asked Stephen Dell, the then park ecologist who was well accustomed to using the Daninject dart gun, to please accompany me with the dart gun that evening to attempt to dart J11. And so it happened, I baited, J5 came in followed by her male J11 and within the split second chance that he was given Steve fired the dart at J11. We waited in the bakkie with baited breath as we watched J11 trot slowly away into the outskirts of the headlights. It would take him +- 2 minutes to drop if the anaesthetic had been delivered correctly. He started to go wobbly and we held our breath. Would he go down or remain just wobbly and un-catchable like so many previously darted jackals? Luck was on our side as he flopped to the ground on the Eastern Airstrip with J5 not leaving her mates side. And so on the night 27 July 2005 this darting concluded the radio collaring of the first territorial pair of jackals in Madikwe. Post darting the data we had wanted for so long came pouring in and believe me such an apparently small thing was a wonderful achievement.

JACKAL PROJECT

But luck was not to be on our side for long and on the morning of 11 May 2006, whilst I was out of the park, Alex phoned me with a problem... he was standing over the carcass of J11! The jackal had been killed most probably by a leopard under Phiri Hill, a new foraging area where J11 and J5 had been visiting on a regular basis for a short time. I was of course very disappointed. All that effort into the dust. However a new horizon opened. Would J5 still keep her territory? And what would become of her pup J18?. This would give us an insight into just what happens when a territorial jackal is shot on a game or sheep farm to be discussed in a later issue.

The darting of J12, J13, J14 and J15 took place between August to October 2005 in the vicinity of the Madikwe Plains and luck was with us at that stage in so far as these attempted dartings went very well

J12 has an interesting story. He was a 2yr old male at the time of darting and although not territorial he lived around the Lion Boma Cut Thru / Kgokong Road area. From early 2006 J12 had gone missing. We could not relocate him and presumed he was dead. However one day we passed a game drive vehicle on Kgokong road and the field guide gave me the bad news. He had seen a jackal on Kgokong Road with a collar but without the transmitter attached which was the

which was the reason why we could not pick J12 up after all. We would try re-darting him at a carcass but at least he was alive. The puzzle to me was just how does a transmitter detach from the collar? (It is embedded in acrylic - indeed a mystery) Therefore we stopped trying to

locate J12 on the receiver for the reasons described above. During March 2006 a jackal was regularly called in at the Kukama open clearing.



At last - J11 - the first Madikwe jackal to be radio collared - July 2005!!



The other side - J11 - killed by a lion or leopard May 2006

JACKAL PROJECT

I did not have a clue who this could be since all jackals with radio collars were being monitored with the exception of one: the introduced jackal J1 and of course J12 whose transmitter had fallen out. The J1 radio collar had gone off late 2005 so this had to be him. Great I would dart and re-collar him. So on morning of 10 March 2006 I approached J1 at the Kukama open clearing took aim with the dart gun and fired. The dart plopped out of the barrel and landed in the dust about "1 mile" away from the jackal who looked up with disdain and moved off. This misfire would cost us dearly as it would be unlikely that J1 would give me another opportunity and decided I would leave it for a while.

At the end march 2006 Alex and I walked up Tshwene Hill to try to relocate on a jackal which we could not find at that time. As I was flipping through the channels on the receiver a loud bleep came from a channel which I had not selected. On closer investigation it was to our utter surprise that the channel bleeping loud and clear from the direction of Kukama open clearing was that of J12. We had found a jackal who we had written off and the transmitter was very evidently still attached to the collar.

J12 had a litter of 4 pups in September 2006 but sadly was killed most probably by a lion or leopard early January 2007. Another valuable data giving territorial animal had bitten the dust.



J12 - the "transmitter-less" jackal feeding on wildebeest carcass
2005

Now the territorial J13 is a special jackal and an interesting case. We have monitored him for over 3 years now ...

To be continued

Rob Harrison-White



Glad to report that our local HO did not become front page news but survived an ordeal with the Sereti female without any injuries - except maybe to his ego - never did a fiercer female challenge him like that! Craig I'll catch lions with you anytime!
The Editor

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not in anyway reflect the official view of the North West Parks and Tourism Board.

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Remember... all previous issues are available online at
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