



Lentswe

la

Madikwe

A NEWSLETTER FOR AND BY THE MADIKWE GAME RESERVE STAKEHOLDERS

SEPTEMBER

2008



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EDITORIAL

Spring is in the air! I wake up in the morning before my alarm clock goes off, I can smell it in the sweet scent of flowering Acacia's, the way the sun drag his feet before going down and the early evening hangs on to the sun's rosy presence. Wistfully I stare at the smallest of clouds wishing it into the first summer rain storm. As always in Madikwe

It was a long, harsh winter. Sometimes it feels like such a thankless environment, when a wild dog dies after being the center of an important project with so many people putting time and effort into it, or when you are fighting a fire and nature throws a fire devil into the air and send you running in another direction!

But oh, how sweet that moment will be when the first rain wash away the dust and give much needed life to veldt and animals, at the same time also clearing my head of cobwebs and the dust from under my teeth! Lets hope this month brings rain and lots of it to Madikwe!

Thanks for contributions that are flooding in! - M Goosen

LETTERS

I thought this was quite nice and interesting for the news letter I know that we are not in the Kalahari but at the rate of desertification we could be part of it in no time at all.

This is an extract from the book "the Kalahari and its plants" by Pieter van der Walt & Elias le Riche

The origin of the word 'Kalahari' (Rapiër 1972)

Some people presume it to be derived from the Kalagadi or Makgadagadi who live there, while others believe it to be a Tswana word. Thomas Baines (1864), the well known traveller of days gone by, reports the name as Magalle galle Karri Karri', which indicates that the Hottentot word t'karri meaning 'hard', forms part of the name. Burchell (1822), on the other hand, uses Karrihari, while Moffat (1858) well known

missionary, reports that the Kgalagadi themselves knew the region as the 'Kgalagare'. As early as 1834, however Dr Andrew Smith wrote about a 'Kalahari (Kirby 1939).

Cheers 4 now
Neal

After a phenomenal drive, I just wanted to share this with everyone in the newsletter:

Due to demands at the lodge I rarely get to go out on game drive anymore, but I was fortunate enough to be invited out by my two guests to join them for an afternoon. Despite driving through the newly burnt areas, it was one of the most unbelievable drives. On our way out from Maroela we saw two large breeding herds of elephants, both were very relaxed. Then, while we were waiting to catch a glimpse of a leopard that had been seen that morning, we saw a brown hyena slink into the area to

try and steal the kill. We thought the leopard would have disappeared, but, with a little patience from our guests we managed to see the leopard, but not the two youngsters. Although the kill was no longer visible, we saw the leopard leap into the tree, and assume its characteristic pose, spread along a branch. We had plenty of time to view it before it was disturbed by a vehicle and snuck out of the tree into the Dicro. On our homeward trip we saw a pair of slender mongoose (interacting) sitting on the edge of the road, a honey badger, large spotted genet, small spotted genet and the Etali's youngsters (the female youngster still has a nasty open wound on her back). All of these sightings were in the burnt areas, and it just goes to show that you should always expect the unexpected and that we are really lucky with the game that we have in this

LETTERS

reserve. Although many people are unhappy to do game drives in the burnt areas, the game viewing on this occasion was better than any other time of year. It wasn't the quantity of sightings that made this drive spectacular, but the quality and the unusualness that made it so special.

Many thanks

Tori Spence
Maroela Tree Lodge

I would like to thank you for the success of the trip on Friday 05th September 2008, the arrangements that you put in place for us at Madikwe were exceptional outstanding.

We got to Molatedi gate at 09H15 and it was all systems go from there onwards, the field guides were on hand to talk to the students and teachers, lunch was delivered on time and the game drives were informative and interesting for the schools.

I would like to extend my gratitude to you, each and every person that made that day possible, all the lodges that helped out with the game drives and food packs.

The principal of Olefile High School, in Pitsedisulejang, Mr Malegane commended North

West Parks and Tourism Board and said," Today you have made history, it is the first time that these children have been taken anywhere by anyone, they are so extremely underprivileged, I don't think even their parents have seen Madikwe and we are only 40km away!"

This trip not only made their day but gave them an opportunity to experience what they have only heard or read about. It is through your help that we managed to reach out to this community and gave them a day to remember in Madikwe, it was quite sad to see that these children also travel about 15km on a dirt road to and from school per day.

If ever there are any charity or awareness projects at Madikwe in future, please consider the community of Pitsedisulejang.

Many thanks again,

Regards
Natasha

Thanks again to Jaci's, Morukuru, Thakadu, Etali, Buffalo Ridge, River Lodge and Hillside for the sponsorships for the Pitsedisulejang community during tourism month.

- M Goosen

Dear Magda / Madam Editor

Having read a number of the published editions of 'Lentswe', we have heard your continuous appeal for contributions toward the section entitled "letters to the editor". We really look forward to this monthly update as do many of your readers and have great empathy for your cause. It is a fact that whilst we all have our own individual opinions on matters, many are reluctant to put forward such opinions in writing. Call it what you may, genuine time constraints, lack of self confidence, a desire to remain on the outside looking in, or worse just plain and simple apathy. I find it ironic that we as a community of individuals driven by similar goals, be it in conservation or the hospitality industry, have diverse view points and in company are often bold, outspoken and at times opinionated and yet we tend to avoid utilising this medium to express ourselves.

I have two issues I wish to bring to your attention. Firstly to let you know that your appeal for contributions should continue as there are those that require encouragement to come forward and share their story. And share their story they will, in time. My second is to deal with the issue of responsibility.

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Communication is by its very nature, two-way - to express and to listen. Your appeal is for the greater community to take responsibility and contribute toward our own newsletter. You in turn as Editor need to ensure that all contributions are validated and that the viewpoints of the individuals are fully reflected and respected. Whilst it might be necessary for you to edit such contributions it is essential that the edits are correctly done and that the contribution continues to make both emotional and grammatical sense. There is nothing more disheartening, than for an individual to take up your cause, make a contribution and find the article is edited without due diligence.

Thank you for the sterling and tireless effort both you

and Declan continue to put into Madikwe.

Kind Regards

Shaun Roe and Rodney Steyn

Jamala Madikwe Royal Safari Lodge _____

The idea behind Lentswe is not to only reflect my own opinions but also that of other stakeholders. In my defense I can only say that the newsletter is done under serious time and staff constraints by myself and Declan. We continue because we believe it adds value and we are passionate to share what we are doing in Madikwe with other. Secondly I am obviously not a trained editor in anyway and English is not my first language. For future editions I will therefore not edit letters submitted to ensure that it reflects

the opinion of the writer, should I find that the letter is not suitable to be placed unedited I will not place it at all. All articles will still be edited as necessary. There has been a suggestion by our regional manager Mr Peter Leitner that we should consider amalgamating Lentswe with the Pilanesberg News. The abovementioned publication is edited and printed professionally and we can consider sending our articles to be included in that publication. Lentswe readers, please let me know how you feel about this suggestion.

Shaun and Rodney, thanks for your continued contributions!

Magda Goosen

THE WOES OF MIDNITE... PART 4

Very little woe this month, suffice to say that she and Scud remain in the boma. Her stitches have been removed after the fight with the other pack and the wound has healed extremely well. Once again a big thanks to Dr. Greef of MediVet. Unfortunately for Midnite and Scud the last WAG (Wild dog advisory group) meeting presented us with a sad update on the status of dogs country wide and as a result there are no

other dogs available to bond with them to rebuild a bigger pack. With this in mind the two of them will be released (likely onto Morukuru, because that's where we caught them) at the earliest opportunity. Watch this space...

Declan Hofmeyr

Subsequently to the writing of this update Midnite died of unknown causes. There was a lot of effort put into this project and more than one person are extremely frustrated and saddened, but these things happen and I guess Midnite's woes is over now.

- M Goosen

MADIKWE FIRES... UPDATE

I can't believe that this time last year I was still doing my best to try and get any fires going in Madikwe. This year is a very different story...

The good rains of last summer, resultant high fuel load and hot dry winds of mid-September have all combined to create a very dangerous fire environment and two run away fires in Madikwe have burned a considerable section of the reserve, mostly in the south east and north west.

To date although the fires have not been mapped with a GPS but at least 21 650 hectares has been burnt which puts us just under our maximum allowable area to be burnt of 22 000 hectares. Obviously the policy now has changed for the remainder of the fire season and all effort will be made to put out any further fires.



Above: This photo was taken a little after midday from inside my vehicle. The game viewer is a mere three or so meters in front of my vehicle and one can clearly see that road itself is completely obscured a little past the front of the game viewer. It's for this reason that one has to be so careful when driving in among the flames and smoke and make sure that one doesn't speed. The last thing you need is to have an accident in the path of a raging inferno.
D Hofmeyr

It is the practice of Madikwe management that early season fires are allowed to burn freely until they burn themselves out. Once a pre-determined burn scar is reached then further fires are extinguished (or at the very least a best effort is made) and this is where we stand now.

Like so many aspects of life in Madikwe fire season can be extremely dramatic and because it has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words I'll let the pictures speak for themselves.

- Declan Hofmeyr



Above: Whirlwinds, or as they've come to be known "Fire Devils", can come up at anytime and form because of the differences in air temperature between fire fronts. This one stretched all the way up to the cloud layer (as you can see by the size of vehicle included for scale) and picked up burning elephant dung as well as substantial burning logs and deposited them, fortunately, on an already burnt area. The reason that this one is black is because it's already over the burnt area and is picking up ash. Prior to this another blew through that picked up flames, sending them tens of meters into the sky, jumping the existing front and started another fire trapping lodge staff that were battling the blaze. Thankfully no one was hurt. (D Hofmeyr)



Above: With some of the big blocks in Madikwe we get big fronts. The fire front in this picture is nearly 6 kms long from the Central Enselberg back to Mistral road.
D Hofmeyr



Above: And finally... just to show that aside from scary, destructive and hot fires can also be truly beautiful. Natures television and fireworks shows... D Hofmeyr

HYENA MONITORING.

It's been just over a month now since we collared a female spotted hyena at the den on airstrip road and things are going well. She has been named Senca meaning "searching", in view of the time spent searching for her.

Before going further I would like to highlight some of the reasons for monitoring these animals.

- The first and probably the most important reason is to determine how much impact hyenas are having on Madikwe's prey base, as we already know they are killing, just not sure how much.
- Secondly, to try and determine the numbers of hyenas and possibly how many clans.
- To try and get some understanding of the genetic variation and diversity amongst Madikwe's hyena population.
- To learn more about the relationships and interactions between spotted and brown hyenas.

I have no doubt we will learn a lot of other related and unrelated things as well.



Above: Senca at the den with a young cub



Above: Senca's new collar being fitted

HYENA MONITORING.

About Senca and her clan

Senca is a 6 year old female weighing close to 70kg.

She is the Matriarch of the clan and has successfully bred 3 litters of cubs. Of the three litters only one cub survives from each of the first two. The survivor of the first litter is now a young adult and is easily recognisable by its missing back

right foot after an encounter with a lion about a year back.

The second cub is still at the den and is estimated to be 5 months old. The third litter is still at the den and consists of 4 cubs about 6 weeks old. One of the youngest cubs was recently killed by its siblings.

There are 4 adults at the den, 3 females and 1 male.

1 sub-adult, approx 18 months.

2 cubs, approx 5 months.

3 cubs, approx 6 weeks.



Above: Young cub mimics older sibling

We have also noted that the hyenas are not going out as a hunting party in the evenings, but rather all going in separate directions like brown hyenas. Should they come across something of interest they make rallying calls and call the rest of the clan in. In the past month they have made 3 confirmed kills, one of which they lost to lions on Matlopi North.

If the hyenas are full they don't tend to move further than Tswasa pan for a drink, however

if they are hungry or patrolling territory they have been recorded moving up to northern river road, west into Madikwe plains and south into the Magageng block (an area of approximately 10 000 hectares).

Another interesting thing we have noticed is that she will only allow one cub to suckle from her, indicating that she is helping the strongest (or weakest) one or that the other two cubs could possibly be mothered by one of the other females.

HYENA MONI-

Hopefully we will be able to answer that question soon.

We should feel very privileged to witness such an in depth insight into the lives of spotted hyenas.

I would finally like to mention that we are planning to start monitoring brown hyenas as well, and for your interest there is a new litter of cubs at the den in Ambush alley. I would like to thank all of the people involved thus far, for their time, hard work and late nights and should anyone wish to know more or perhaps like to come and give us a hand, please feel free to contact me.

Photographs: Greg Smith & Brian de Gruchy
Text: Brian de Gruchy



Above: Senca chasing one of the cubs away



Above: Hyenas doing what hyenas do!



Above: 5 month brown hyena, Ambush alley den



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! (No animals has been hurt either and she is up and about again!)
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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