

# Bush Telegraph

*The Official Newsletter for Southern Africa Conservation*

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**LEGODIMO NATURE RESERVE IS SITUATED ON THE BANKS OF THE LIMPOPO RIVER. IT IS A PART OF THE TULI BLOCK IN THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA.**



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## Editor's Note:

Hello from the Legodimo and once again welcome to this month's edition of the 'Bush Telegraph'.

As the heart of the autumn is in full swing here at the reserve and the rainy season comes to a close, the shorter days and cooler evenings are a reminder that the winter dry season will soon be upon us. River beds swollen in the previous months are starting to level off and a more frequent eye on the water hole filling is under watch. The landscape is still lush and the animal sightings are a plenty and a constant stream of volunteers continue to flow in.

We are focused on getting the team ready for the dry season ahead and look forward to all the volunteers arriving to help conserve this amazing wilderness. As always, keep on conserving and thanks for reading.

# Why Are There No Giraffes in Legodimo??

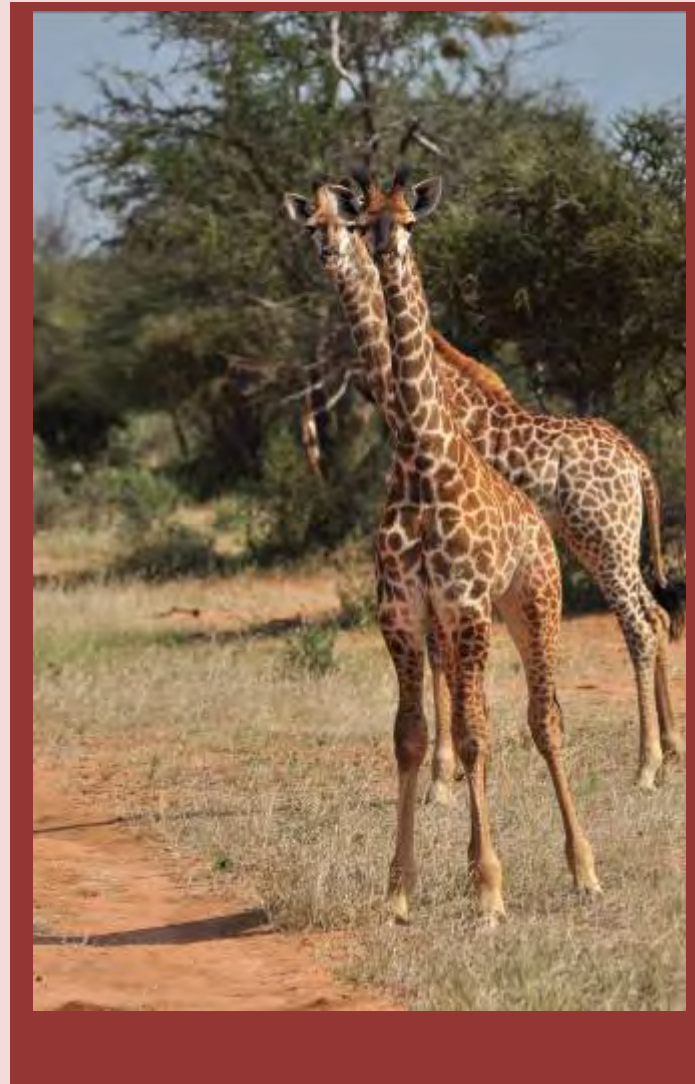
Elephants, impala, warthogs and hippos a plenty but where did all the giraffes go? The reserve on a glance looks like the perfect vegetation for all wild animals with space in abundance, fences to a minimum and lush landscapes but why the lack of the giraffe?

Apparently the reason is very simple, the giraffes feed off the tall Acacia trees which make up a large part of their diets but because of a very large elephant population here in Legodimo, which also feast off the Acacias tree, competition with this food source is significant. The elephants, in addition, strip down these trees to a height undesirable to the giraffe which, being the tallest animal in the world, needs vegetation at a height that makes feeding safe and easy.

The acacias are the thorn trees of Africa with gnarled branches and jagged thorns. However it also has abundant blooms and a graceful form making this paradox very much a reflection of the continent itself. Dominantly a woody plant of the Sub Saharan Africa with over 700 species has leaves that have evolved to retain moisture. This property alone makes it very much a favourite food for the giraffe as the high water content allows for long periods of time passing without them actually getting thirsty. Consequently with this minimum need to drink the bending down to the river to get water is lessened which, in turn, means a lower risk for a predator such as a crocodile to grab its neck and kill it. The trees' sharp horns do not stop them gathering and plucking foliage and they have a long, muscular tongue specially adapted to select and gather. It's a selective feeder and feeds 16-20 hours a day, 65 lbs of foliage at a time.

Another interesting phenomenon with the Acacia tree is that in order to combat large mammalian browsers such as the giraffe or kudu some release chemicals in the form of toxic tannins which render leaflets impractical forcing the animals to move to other trees. There is also an association with biting ants, an ant-plant-mutualism, an intriguing relationship in the natural world, however it is yet another factor in how the food source of the giraffe is reduced.

So, in all, even though Legodimo landscape is described as the Savannah, grasslands are abundant with acacias trees, the elephant competition with their specific mode of destruction, as well as the trees biting ant inhabitants, all contribute in reducing its numbers. Hence the giraffe, as described by early written records as, "magnificent in appearance, unique in form, unique in gait, colossal in height and inoffensive in character" and was once even thought to be a cross between a camel and a leopard, still the tallest creature in the world has migrated from Legodimo to more distant lands.



**Scientific Name:** Giraffe  
*camelopardalis*

**Size:** 18 feet

**Weight:** Up to 3,000 pounds

**Lifespan:** 25 years

**Habitat:** Dense forest to open plains

**Diet:**  
Herbivorous/browsers

**Gestation:** Between 14 and 16 months

**Predators:** Humans



Legodimo's Greenhouse came into fruition in 2010 and is still a central point around base camp with volunteers tending to it on a daily basis with the early morning watering and midday weeding. It's main purpose is the growing of trees and plants which are threatened to become locally extinct and a process called 'recruitment' is carried out whereby seeds are planted in black bags and allowed to reach 1-2 metres in size before being planted in the bush in the early October at the start of the rainy season. The other intention of this greenhouse is to grow food for our kitchen.

One of these plants is the 'Fever' tree, named by the colonials who used to camp under its shade and thought that it was the cause of malaria before it was realised that it was the mosquito. This tree is highly prized by elephants and porcupines hence its lack of existence on this reserve.

Another of such trees is the 'Weeping Baer Bean' which is again grown to a good root mass size in order to protect the basal part of the tree and also to a point of secondary thickening of its trunk. The Impala Lily is also highly prized and is used in traditional medicine in Botswana but is threatened with local extinction and is hence another of our projects. And finally one of the most important aims is the planting of grass seeds for our latest research project on land rehabilitation.

Foods that are currently grown are spinach and tomatoes although the pests like the squirrel are making it very challenging. One idea by the Project Manger G was to release a python into the nursery but the only problem being that 'Zen' his pet doq wouldn't fare so well!



*Sam and re-cycled glass bottle borders.....*

### Walk to the Highest Point



**On Top of the World!**

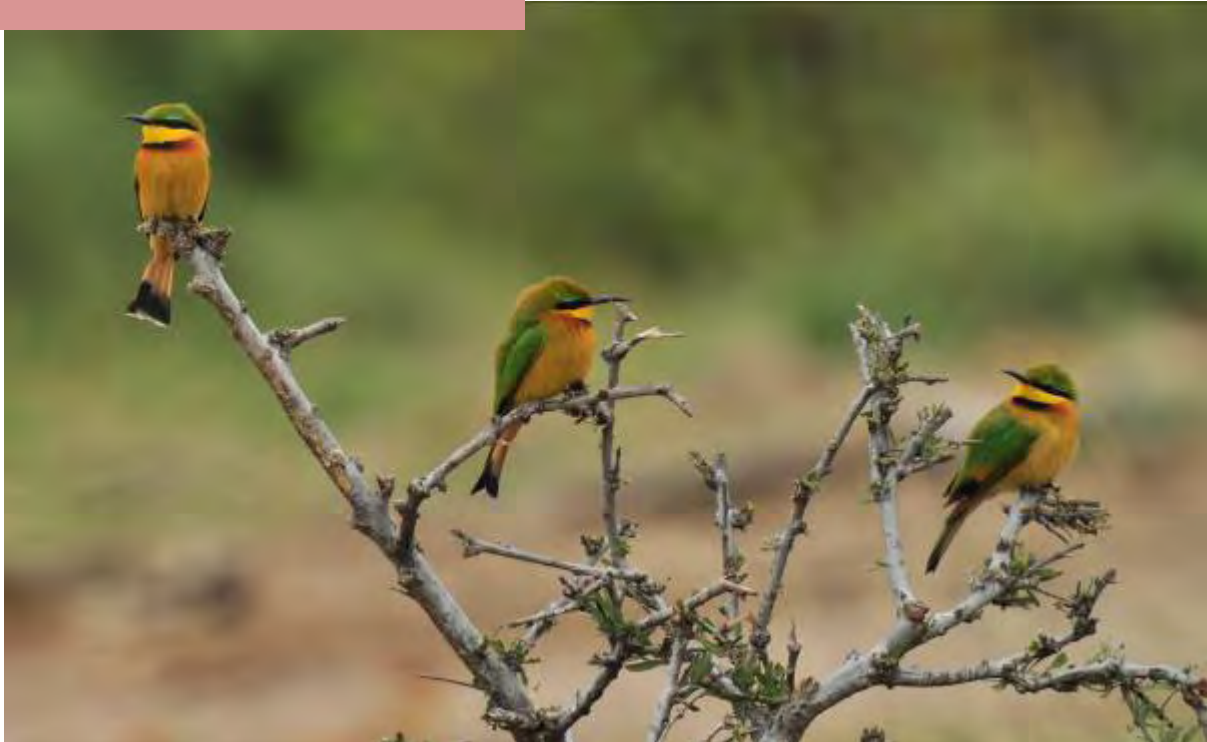
Walks a plenty in Legodimo but none more special than the trail that leads to 'Tweep' ( the Botswanan name for mountain reedbuck). It is the known highest point here on the reserve and is one of the 'Kopjes' (Afriacaan for rocky little hill) with a height of 880m and a trig beacon marking its peak. Looking out from this point one can see far out to the Northern border of the reserve on the Botswana side as well as far as the Platjan border on the South African side. Never is such the vastness of the area realised and the scope and size of the 150,000 hectares of this conservation seen anywhere else. The contrasting differences in both of the landscapes is so apparent here, with Botswana being open and less species dense and the fenced thick South Africa area sitting across the river. Even the air above the Limpopo is different, it's like an inversion, a barrier for the rain and then there is openness and pathways in the bush mysteriously leading to the home of many a wild animal Klipspringer, impala, hyena and elephant shrew are a few of the creatures that inhabit the area with the large leaf rock fig growing out from cracks in the rocks. Whilst Marulas, Mopani's, Grassiers and Knob thorns are a few of the other trees that line the route.

With the 2 hour walk from camp and a hour back the anticipation of the whole view over Botswana opening up when you reach the last little bit heeds the last little climb with adrenaline and excitement. Slightly out of breath and the whole voyage sheds its reward. It's always windy on the top and the thrill of spotting whole elephant herds moving through the trees are a spectacular sight every time. Many a visitor has scathed and scratched their names in the beacon at the top wanting to show all that they reached the summit. Whether it's windy, silent, icy cold or scorching sun, all who visit have a different tale to tell.



## Easter Egg Hunt

Easter landed upon us this month and was celebrated in true traditional style with an Easter egg hunt and egg decorating. Led by Andy the volunteers were taken off camp whilst the staff began, anywhere and everywhere, to hide the festive treats so the search would be a challenge and a race. Storming back into camp the eager volunteers enthusiastically began the hunt. Screams and shouts, glees and delights as the little packets of chocolate covered marshmallows eggs were discovered. Hidden under rocks, plants, pans and bushes, high up on rafters and under skeletons one by one the eggs were found. Competition emerged and grabs for the find continued and happy smiles and delights as the sweet treats filled the hands of the volunteers and bigger smiles still as they munched away at their prizes. A big thanks to Sam for organising the event which was taken over by Chris who continued with an egg decorating contest. Coloured markers, paints, beads, patterns, animals, abstracts anything and everything of individual style and again all in good humour and interest. Judging, of course, was by voting and coming down to the last two, it was neck and neck with volunteers Dina and Ian, each with very different masterpieces, but the final decision was made. Dina from Copenhagen was deemed to be the one with the most artistic flare on her egg that day and voted our winner.



One of the tasks that a volunteer will most likely undertake at some time during their stay at Legodimo is to help out with road maintenance.

Water bars (drainage deflection humps) have a very easy mode of construction but their purpose and utilisation is enormous. When it rains the water runoff often creates a mini river gushing down the road hence the idea is to try to slow this water down at certain intervals and deflect run-off water off the road surface and into the natural vegetation alongside it. If this does not occur erosion of the road will occur.

Raindrops themselves hitting the ground starts what is known as 'splash' erosion which loosens the particles and as there is no resistance because there is no vegetation on the road water starts picking up speed which in turn leads to what is termed 'sheet' erosion, and this in turn will eventually change into 'gully' erosion.

Prevention of erosion, however, can be achieved effectively by constructing 'water bars' across road surfaces so continuous loss of road surface gravel every time it rains is minimised. A water bar slows the water flow, directs it off the road surface and concentrates it at an overflow site.

Water bars are relatively easy to build and with help and hard work from our volunteers many of the roads on the Legodimo reserve have these in place. They are constructed from earth that is dug from a remote site in the bush and built with the sides of the mound forming gradual slopes on both sides. These then extend beyond the road on either side which prevents water from simply flowing around the hump and back onto the road. As the runoff water is then deflected off the roadway and into the surrounding landscape it is collected in a shallow channel cut along the up-side of the road. The in-slope channel is then lined with a protective layer of stones which helps slow down the water flow and prevent the erosion of the channel.

The key to successful cross-road drainage is not only the effective construction but also continual maintenance in order to clear any blockages of water flow and also to repair storm damage as soon as it occurs, hence our work is never quite done here at Legodimo as nature demands a continuous process of destruction and construction.

And lastly, of course, another very important purpose of the water bar is its use as a speed bump and by slowing vehicles down this dramatically reduces their impact and disturbance of wildlife.



## Daily bread making can be creative!



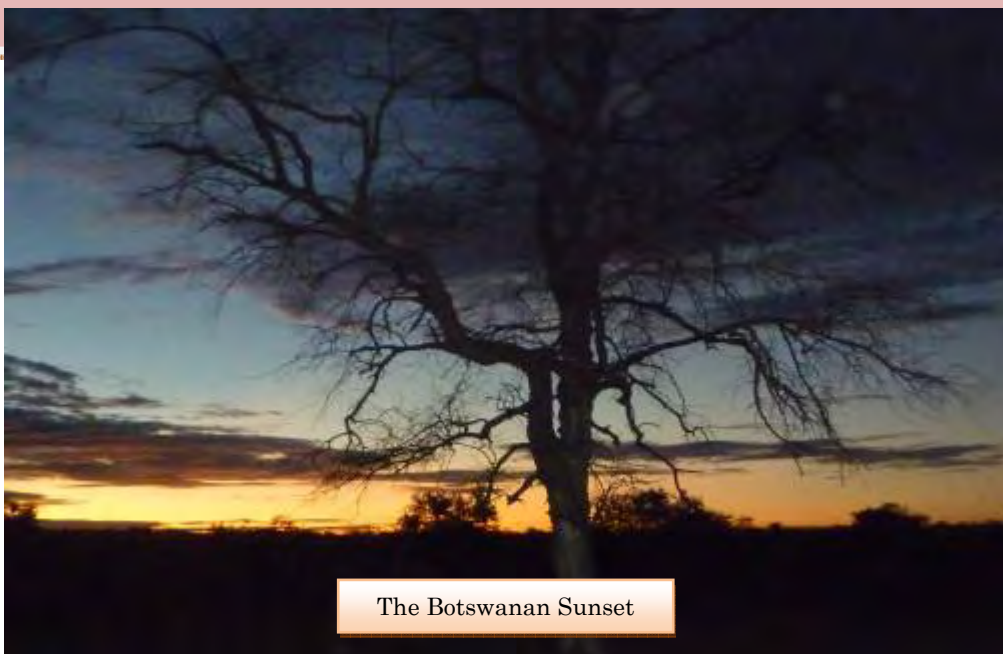
Bonjour à tous,

Je m'appelle Tristan, j'ai 21 ans, j'habite Paris et j'ai réalisé l'an dernier ce qui reste pour moi la plus belle expérience possible. Grâce à Projects Abroad, j'ai passé deux mois et demi en plein cœur de la savane au Botswana, à Legodimo, au bord du fleuve Limpopo qui sépare le pays de l'Afrique du sud. En plein milieu de nulle part, entouré d'une superbe végétation et d'animaux tous plus beaux les uns que les autres, le projet de conservation de l'environnement est vraiment quelque chose d'exceptionnel!

En deux mois et demi, j'ai eu la chance de rencontrer des personnes incroyables, venues des quatre coins du monde, chacun avec son univers prêt à partager, offrir, et découvrir. Cette vie en communauté m'a énormément apporté au niveau personnel en améliorant mon anglais, mais surtout en permettant à tous d'exprimer ce qu'il ressent, sans se soucier du regard des personnes qui vous écoutent. En dehors des nombreux volontaires que j'ai côtoyés durant ces deux mois et demi, les membres du staff de Projects Abroad sont également adorables. Pour la plupart Sud-Africains, ce sont des gens d'une gentillesse et d'une générosité rare qui vous mettront totalement à l'aise et en confiance dès les premières minutes passées sur le sol africain! N'ayez donc aucune crainte en vous demandant où vous allez atterrir, ils seront là pour vous.

À Legodimo, vous vivrez dans un cadre d'une beauté époustouflante. Vous êtes au bord d'un des plus longs fleuves d'Afrique qui traverse plusieurs pays de la partie sud du continent, le Limpopo, habité par de nombreux animaux comme des hippopotames, des crocodiles ou autres varans. Il vous suffit de sortir de votre chambre de marcher 20 mètres pour apprécier un petit déjeuner en face d'un lever de soleil des plus agréables. Derrière le camp, qui possède des installations idéales pour vivre et à la fois respecter la nature qui vous entoure, des étendues à perte de vue accompagnées de quelques montagnes que vous pourrez escalader afin de voir un panorama d'une des plus grandes réserves ouvertes d'Afrique. En effet, Legodimo n'a pas de barrières, les éléphants, rhinocéros et autres lions ont donc tout loisir de se balader et passer d'un pays à l'autre. Il vous sera donc possible d'observer une vingtaine d'éléphants venir se baigner ou boire l'eau de la petite piscine artificielle construite par les volontaires qui vous ont précédé!

Tous les soirs un feu de camp s'organise et les volontaires se réunissent pour dîner et discuter de la journée passée, souvent marquée par des observations d'animaux magnifiques. De temps en temps, les membres du staff s'improvisent musiciens et vous joueront de superbes mélodies de « Drum » qui vous feront ressentir l'Afrique et ses sonorités uniques! Non loin du camp, Matatane, village tswana où vous aurez loisir de passer un peu de temps avec la population locale, des personnes tout aussi adorables et accueillantes. Un peu plus loin du côté sud-africain et chaque semaine vous aurez la possibilité de partir pour une soirée du côté de Alldays, ses bars de chasseurs où vous ferez des rencontres intéressantes et amusantes. Durant la journée les volontaires sont libres de se rendre au cyber-café ou se promener dans cette rue pleine de marchands ambulants et autres barbiers. N'ayez aucune crainte, ces gens sont vraiment marrants!



The Botswanan Sunset

Legodimo welcomed three new staff members this month, Chris, Ian and Fran. All arriving from the UK and each bringing with them their wealth of knowledge and personality to help contribute to our project here in Botswana.

### Chris Polly

Chris arrived from London at the beginning of the month and is our new volunteer co-ordinator. He has a degree in Environmental Protection from the University of Bournemouth and brings his expertise and knowledge from his studies as well as extensive work experience on conservation projects around the world. Working on a Seamatan project in Tenerife he tracked family groups of whales and dolphins recording sounds and matching their languages and has travelled to the rainforest in Brazil and Equator where he was involved with tree rehabilitation and trail guiding. Other work has included setting up low impact living habitats and wilderness protection making areas and trails for people to live in without having an effect on the ecosystem. He welcomes the opportunity to put his skills into practice and to make an impact in Botswana as well as undertaking a huge mapping project here at Legodimo which requires tremendous efforts as he pioneers his way through this challenge as so far there have been no maps made.

### Ian Baxter

Ian graduated from Aberystwyth University with a degree in Economics in 1989, and worked in the steel industry in South Wales in a number of Production and Engineering management positions, until 1999, when, he left the UK. He has spent the last eleven years travelling, surfing (and working!!) abroad, including several years as an Overland Expedition Leader, leading trips, driving and maintaining an all-terrain expedition truck throughout the Middle East, North Africa and Asia, including 18 months working in India and Nepal. After "retiring" from the overland world, he lived in Hamburg, Germany for three years, teaching TEFL English, before coming out of retirement to lead expeditions from Nepal through Tibet, the Himalayas, and China. – including getting a truck to Everest Base Camp(around 17,500 ft!!) He worked on a turtle conservation project in Costa Rica last year, before joining Projects Abroad earlier this year. His motives for working with Projects Abroad are simple – the desire to combine his management and team leadership skills with his love of travel, working with like-minded people, and doing something beautiful, challenging, worthwhile and environmentally positive! He is our new business manager here at Legodimo.



### Fran Karol

Fran joins us from the UK also and is the new social manager here at the project. As a trained Homeopathic Practitioner and a degree in science she spent many years in private practice before having a career break a couple of years ago and undergoing extensive travel. Qualifying as a yoga teacher last year her sense of adventure for new challenges and places brings her to Legodimo. Fran will be posting regular blogs of happenings here at the project as well as communicating with the volunteers on Face book and the monthly newsletter.



Meike and Gerrit Prinsloo,  
Desk Officer and Conservation Director.



Andrew Jackson and Sam McCulloch Conservation Co-ordinators

## And Finally...

I hope you all enjoyed hearing some news from Legodimo! And as usual we always enjoy hearing from you all; it's been ages since some of you got in touch with us and some of you that have only just left still haven't let us know you are safe, how are you getting on and where are you are now?

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or queries, anything you want to know about the bush that you didn't learn while you were here or anything you have forgotten! If anyone has some time to spare and you find your mind wondering back to your time at Legodimo we would love to hear some of your stories and experiences.

All for now.....

Fran Karol

Social Manager

Legodimo Nature Reserve, Botswana

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