



The River at its highest

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In-between all the fun and entertaining times to be had at Legodimo, the volunteers put in some hard work and many projects have already been seen through to completion this year! So I thought it was time to review the achievements and, of course, include lots of photos for you all to see the finished results.

The Limpopo River Viewing Deck and Steps

During the summer months, the rain arrives causing an explosion of growth; the trees turn green and the grass grows tall. Between camp and the river there is now a large section of very appetising grass, which entices the Hippos out of the water to graze of a night time. So in order to provide a little bit more protection from these amazing but also rather intimidating mammals, a retaining wall has been built just past the braai area, under the Nyala Berry tree.

The wall was built up using conveyor belting, cables and wire. Firstly, a number of poles were cemented into the ground before affixing the conveyor belting and strengthening it with wire. Then came the hard graft; 14 trailer-loads of sand from nearby dry river beds was needed to fill up behind the wall and make it level with the rest of camp!



Securing the Conveyor belting



One of many hours shovelling

Once all the sand had been shovelled the volunteers decided to get a chair and enjoy their hard work. They quickly discovered that a considerable amount of compaction of sand would be needed! The chair legs sank in completely! A set of steps has been built next to the deck to allow easy access to a worn path down to the river. When these were dug out the volunteers again spent time transferring this excess sand to the top of the deck. This sand provided a much firmer surface thus removing the issue of the sinking chairs, as well as making the deck look as if it has been there for many years.



The new area in use



The steps

The Nyala Berry Tree Platform

After several volunteers suggesting a platform be built in the Nyala Berry tree at camp we decided to take on the challenge. They started by collecting two large gum tree poles (old electricity pylons found on the reserve) to make a sturdy ladder up to the platform. This was no easy task taking 5 strong young lads to carry each of the poles!

Once the ladder was in place the supporting structure was put up with some long periods spent in uncomfortable positions clinging to the tree! Then came the easy task of securing the planking to the support structure and adding a latte railing. The finished result is absolutely great and it provides a cool quiet place to take an afternoon nap and some volunteers have even persevered with sleeping up there at night despite the constant buzzing of mosquitoes.

The Island Retreat

In August last year a bridge was built from the river bank in front of camp to one of the small islands, a distance of about 12m, providing a tranquil place to relax. Over the past few months the island has become very overgrown, resulting in people using it less often. So an area was cleared, two benches constructed, a table placed in the middle and a Mopane wood roof built, essentially creating a shaded picnic spot. We will also be able to do bird observations from this spot, giving us three sites along the Limpopo River to record the different bird species.



Securing the support to the tree



Cutting the planks to size



The island seating area

www.projects-abroad.net
www.volunteer-conservation-south-africa.org

Bird Species List

Over the past 6 months we have made great progress with the development of our bird species list. We now have 132 recorded species!



Lilac-breasted Roller



Red-crested Korhaan



Yellow-Billed Hornbill



Red-Headed Weaver



Verreux Eagle



White-backed Vulture



African Fish Eagle



Woodland Kingfisher



Barn Owl

Erosion Control

The reserve's roads have been hit hard over the past few months with the persistent rains. There have been occasions when we have recorded 70mls of rain in a day which is almost half of the area's average annual rainfall. After the earth is saturated, run-off water begins to collect and run down roads (a "road" is essentially the best path with the least amount of resistance), gaining momentum as it flows and increasing erosion potential. This proved too much for the current water diverts and packed rock that are built on the roads and the water washed away great sections.



The Damage!

The volunteers, with the help of Jannie, have been out to repair the worst-hit stretches of road. Again this involved shovelling great trailer loads of stoney sand to fill-in the ditches and build up the road surface again. The water diverts were also repaired, ensuring run-off water leaves the road surface as soon as possible to reduce the amount of erosion occurring. Next to each water divert a run-off ditch allows water to run away from the road surface and into the bush with the natural gradient.



Collecting the sand....

...To unload the sand



A job well done

Volunteer's Corner....

The following article has been contributed by a recent volunteer. Remember no two people will have the same experience at Legodimo.....

My 2 months at Legodimo Nature Reserve.....



An African Rock Python

'When I first arrived I was met in a small town called Alldays by Jamie, the conservation leader. I was excited to go to camp on the open-top cruiser. When we got to camp I was greeted by the other volunteers and had plenty of time to unpack and settle in. Then I was given a safety briefing by Jamie before starting work that afternoon. We went out on the reserve where I was lucky enough to see elephants on the first of many research drives.

The reptiles around camp are really good to see all the time. Being able to learn about them as well as seeing them was really good. Often you can watch crocodiles in the river and you get the occasional snake in camp. The knowledge you learn is great!



When we went on research drives we would always see lots of different antelope, you are almost 100% certain of seeing Impala, as well as other species, including Zebra, Elephants and of course the occasional Leopard. No day at Legodimo is the same; everyday is full of surprises!

The accommodation, food and general lifestyle is great. Normally you work in the morning, rest in the heat of the day and then more work late afternoon. When the sun goes down we light the camp fire and relax.

My time at Legodimo Nature Reserve has been incredible! I've met lots of new people and learnt loads about Africa, the bush and its amazing animals.



Lastly, thank you to all the staff for making my time here amazing!

Jonathan Murray – 04-Jan-2009 to 02-Mar-2009

Mammal Profile.....

Southern Giraffe – *Giraffa Camelopardalis*

♂ wt 970-1395 Kg

♀ wt 700-950 Kg

Age – up to 25 years



- **Appearance** – It is the tallest mammal in the world with an unmistakable long neck and legs. It has a short upstanding mane, two short horns on its head and high shoulders sloping steeply to hind quarters. Each individual has a complex pattern of irregular dark patches; males tend to grow darker with age and females paler. Males can be distinguished from females by their larger size and thicker horns. They can reach up to 5 metres in height and have the largest heart of all land mammals.
- **Social/Mating System** – The giraffe is non-territorial and sociable, living in loose, open herds. There are no leaders and minimal co-ordination of herd movement. Females are more sociable than males and are rarely out of sight of other females. Their height and excellent eyesight enables giraffe to maintain visual contact with other herd members over large distances. The collective noun for a group of Giraffe is a 'Journey'.
- **Feeding** – Mainly diurnal, spending 15-20 hours a day feeding. Their great height enables them to browse from the crowns of trees that are beyond the reach of all other terrestrial browsers (except the elephant). They feed mainly on broad-leafed deciduous foliage during the rains and evergreens in the dry season favouring thorn trees. They have a prehensile tongue that can be as long as 45cm, allowing them to strip the nutrient-rich leaves from the thorny branches. They have a very efficient digestive system enabling them to extract every last drop of moisture from their food. Drinking proves more of a challenge; they must either straddle or bend their forelegs to reach the water.
- **Reproduction** – 1 Calf, year-round with a gestation period of 14-14.5 months. The calf can walk within an hour and must follow its mother as she moves quickly. Often a maternity group is set up and calves are guarded in a crèche. Males compete for mating rights by ritual "necking": 2 males swing their heads at each other delivering a sledgehammer blow against its opponent's flanks. Males remain in the maternal herd until they outgrow their resemblance to females at about 3 years, they then join bachelor herds.
- **Predation** - Lions are a serious enemy and quite capable of toppling an adult giraffe. They often chase it over uneven ground hoping it will lose its footing. Giraffes rely on speed for escape; their great loping gallop can cover ground at 60Km/h.

New Volunteers this month.....

Alan West, Pernille Mouritsen, Thor Melbye, Pia Sieg, Sonja Larsen, Esther De Groot, Jolien Klitsie and Emily Edwards.
See you all soon! We hope you'll have a fantastic experience with us!!

Volunteers Leaving this month...

Jonathan Murray, Vincent Visser, Tom Silburn, Maaïke Van Der Aalst, Max Tenaglia, Richard Underhill, Alan West and Pernille Moritsen
Thankyou for all your hard work at the reserve, we really couldn't do a lot of the work we do here without your help!

Upcoming Event



Bike4Beasts MTB Challenge 26th April 2009

We have been invited to help out at this year's Bike4Beasts – the Diamond Route; a 65Km cycle race on Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve, South Africa. The main objective of this race is to raise money to support the conservation activities of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT). The course follows existing vehicle dirt tracks on undulating and varied terrain involving sections on elevated rocky ground and some sandy river crossings. The reserve is home to a large variety of large game species including elephants, black and white rhino, lions and the endangered African wild dog
We will set up and man one of the water stations along the route, flying the Projects Abroad flag and answering any questions people may have about our conservation project over the weekend of the event

As always I hope you all enjoyed hearing some news from Legodimo! And as usual we always enjoy hearing from you all, its 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 all 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. We are in the process of updating the conservation website and any volunteer stories or quotes would be very gratefully welcomed!

Also, please can past volunteers send me any photo's of predators that they may have, especially, Leopard and Hyena, to help with identification of individuals.

Thank you!

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