

# WildlifeAct

*From 10th November to 9th December 2013*



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December 2013

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## Introduction

Our project work in 2011 with WildlifeACT has left deep traces and obvious addiction symptoms.

With all our strength we returned to Kwa Zulu Natal, where the steep green mountains are criss-crossed by wild rivers. At least during the rainy season ... (for which we covered ourselves with good rainshooters and warm clothes!)



*unser Team mit Forscher Cole (2v.r.)*

The wild dog nests, the big cats and the rare black rhinos are observed daily in the various parks. They are exposed to poachers throughout Africa and decimated.

This time we were in the new camp in the iMfolozi Game Reserve and Mkhuze GR in use. Together with other volunteers and the monitors Cole (Mkhuze) and Antoine (iMfolozi) we were in the park several hours a day - mostly from 04:00 o'clock - to find and count the highly endangered wild dog noodle.

Although individual animals carry a transmitter, finding them often took hours and sometimes the dogs did not show up.

How important this 'monitoring' is showed us during an incident in Mkhuze Park. There caught 4 wild dogs about 1 km away from each street in Schlingen

of poachers. Only thanks to Monitor Cole's keen sense - which was suspicious and was able to search with Rangers for the area (from which we could receive the signals), three dogs could be rescued. Sadly, any help came too late for one of the young dogs.

As a photographer I also had the unique opportunity during these four weeks to photograph the wild dogs as this would hardly be possible as a tourist.

It was an intense time. Traveling in all weathers, sleeping in modest accommodation, self catering, no sleeping in and getting mixed up with other individualists from all over the world.

But it was worth it once again - it was an unforgettable four weeks.

## **1st part: Mkuze**

Zululand is green and blooms after rainfall. Huge orange flomboyant trees, the umbrella acacia trees strewn with white flowers, bushes and grass that we found brown and dead in October are now alive, growing and providing food. Often



the clouds billow in the sky, thunder rumble accompanies us again and again and in the evening there are spectacular thunderstorms from time to time.

In the first part of our one-month stay we are in Mkuze. Close to the main camp Mantuma our little research camp is set up, very simple and yet quite comfortable, if the windows had mosquito nets, it could be really great. But these determine the life here and annoyed us the first nights properly. Also, a large part of our five-team looks pretty speckled on the arms, because some rash

there rages with small red bubbles. From where? Nobody can imagine something.

Although our work is usually very comfortable, we are always tired. The day starts early, before sunrise. Mostly we go to 4.00 clock on monitoring drive for the wild dogs. The pack, which consists of six adults and twelve young dogs from two almost identical litters, takes patience and keeps us pretty busy. They can not always be found, and often, even when we see them, we succeed in counting them. Once one of the kittens is missing. Another time, the leader dog limps on one of the three legs that remain to her. Like a second member of the family, she caught herself in a poacher's loop and lost a hind leg, which hardly impedes her. Fortunately, the animals love the streets and often move here. Cole, our monitor knows every little way and can bring us through shaking tracks and through the bush close to the dogs. If they sleep in the bushes, it is hardly possible to sight them, even if they can be located well with the telemetry device. But this is often a matter of luck, because the operation of the device is not quite so easy, needs a little practice that you hardly comes when you only work with it every few days. In addition, often thunderstorms or other vibrations disturb the reception, or you are wrong about 180 degrees because it beeps there ... Nevertheless, until now we have the pack under control. We have also seen some of the rare black rhinos and have identified their identity through the markings in their ears, visited the cheetah family, whose mother has a transmitter, and visited a group of vultures on cadavers laid out for them in the

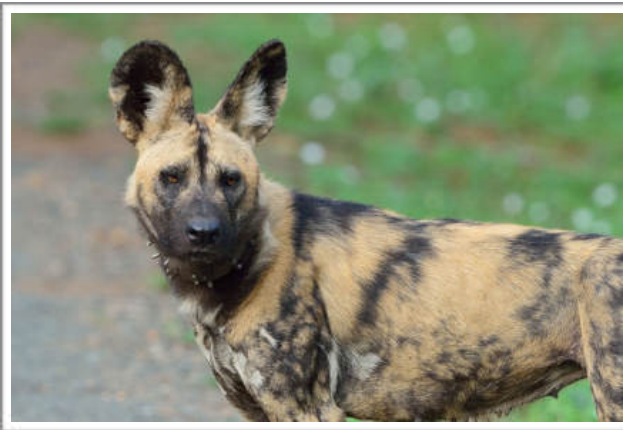


"restaurant". They are kept in the park where, unlike the outdoor areas, they are safe from poisoning.

Our tasks consist of these morning and evening monitor rides (each from about 16.00 clock to after darkening), vultures, white tailed mongoose, hyena and a few more). First by hand, then on the computer. Above all, a lot of waiting is announced and the long sitting on the benches of the pickup is quite exhausting.

But the ride through wind, sun and rain is also a lot of fun! Photographing is not only a pleasure, but also work in the sighting of the dogs. Here are recognition sheets important, which contain the sex, the most characteristic features of coloring or form and other special features. Side photos and portraits of 18 dogs must be caught, assigned and named. Manfred's photography equipment and skills are highly appreciated here.

During the morning we come back to camp, eat something small and start working here. Floors and walls, the roof is averse to start or keep the camp. Monday is shopping day and supplies are displayed, especially with wine, beer and a huge beef fillet. Otherwise we can also buy chips, wine and beer here in



the camp.

Today I retired my day off, stayed in the morning and slept longer. Glad to be alone again. The group dynamics are interesting - there are five of us, two English women, who show us how the world is going, an Austrian, which should rather be called multinational, because she has lived everywhere else and we both. We are the old people's home (all over 45 to 65), in the next park is at the moment the teen group. Cole, the young monitor, does not have it easy with all his different volunteers, his dogs and the many bosses who do not always share the same goals. So the communication is disturbed at the moment, because lions should be exposed here in the next few days, but this may not penetrate to the

*Wild dog with transmitter collar*

*Young wild dogs playing*

outside. It will change the almost perfect world, because a pack of lions did not exist fifty years ago and people and animals have relied on it. The cards will be redistributed with consequences for wild dogs, poachers and tourist stream, which will be interesting to watch.

It is also interesting to just sit here and watch the bird diversity. It beeps and flutters, calls and scolds in all pitches of the colored birdies. Our camp is not fenced so we have other guests. Luckily, there are no monkeys here at the



moment, but now and then nyala and impala. Incidentally, these have responded very specifically to the rain of recent days: the first babies were sighted a few days ago, now the kindergartens are increasing in number. Impalas can control the timing of the birth, and then put their adorable kittens into the world when it is full of food and hiding places, which amounts to an explosion.

There is a lot of work going on today - while some will be busy with crafting, I am assigned the task of preparing the camera traps that will be distributed tomorrow in the park. The data on the memory cards were viewed, stored, cataloged and evaluated. In addition to monkeys and antelopes, you can also see elephants, both rhinos, ardvarks, porcupines, hyenas and leopards.

Meanwhile, we have the cameras, the boxes of Manfred were provided with various concrete drills with the perfect holes for hanging, along the fence to Phinda. For each of the three especially as the bolts of the attached - the cameras from the meant to hang thirty

*Camp work*

cameras that was a huge fight, locks were not really to be army material are probably not centimeters above the ground ..

Yesterday was a dramatic, theoretically exciting, practically boring day. The dogs were not counted the night before because a thunderstorm arose and drove us home. In the morning we still found them in the same area as in the morning of the previous day, which made Cole startled. He reported this to the chief ranger by radio, and he announced that a patrol would search the area, as it was often laid out by poachers with slings. Shortly after their departure came the message that they had found dogs in Schlingen. We were nailed up on the pc-up and used the radio conversations to keep track of what was happening. One of

the dogs had been suffocated by the sling, as were three Impala and two Nyala. One of the young dogs had a noose around his neck, but he was still alive.



Leading Tembelishle, wearing a metal studded collar to protect himself from the wires, was trapped uninjured, but had to be stunned to loosen the noose. The young was released during the unconsciousness and ran away after waking, but fortunately all the animals recovered during the night

Assemble a wildlife camera together. Even though it is part of nature that not all littermates get through, this is a terrible spectacle and simply incomprehensible. On the same day over 100 poisoned vultures were found in iMfolozi, whose beaks and claws should have been sold to the warlocks. The war against the poachers is in full swing, but it is often assumed that Park employees have their hands on the game.

Finally, after Edward Park Manager has prohibited further driving, our car has received new tires. The metal coat was visible, it was almost dangerous to volunteer to cart around with it, especially because you drive pretty racy on the streets outside the park when picking up. The tire change was done in an African way: Edward got new tires, which did not fit. As the decision was made on Saturday, action had to be taken quickly, and by 12 noon, the tires had to be brought to the garage one and a half hours away. Before that, our old Toyota's wheels were dismantled, for which it was jacked up on stones and logs. After coming back the wheels were screwed on again, whereby one of the nuts had apparently dissolved in air - for hours it was searched in the worst mood for the good piece, unfortunately without success. So in the evening only Lizzie and Cole went to the monitoring session, which seemed to be boring. Fortunately, everyone has now recovered, as have Tarique's car and this morning were with the dogs who did not show up and the lions who are waiting in the Boma for their release.

It's Dee and her three nearly two-year-old boys, two girls and a boy, who were all anesthetized the day before yesterday by the vet so that the girls could be treated with contraceptives for a year and the boy could be provided with a transmitter. They have to get used to the cars a bit and not react aggressively, then they will be released into the wild and will receive new male and female growth, so that two packs will form, as the poor son will soon be off Mother will be rejected.

We are looking forward to the move to Imfolozi, to a new group and a different monitor, because with Cole it's just a bit like a match with no box: the spark of passion does not jump, even if he tries hard. Daniela, the Austrian Frenchwoman goes to Tembe, Deirdrie and Lizzie stay here, but Lizzie has rebooked her flight and stayed one week longer than originally planned.

## Part 2, iMfolozi

The journey to iMfolozi was long and uncomfortable, because the cargo was so extensive that our feet could not find a place. But we are convinced that it has paid off. First we were taken to a small lodge in Mtubatuba, which gave us the opportunity to exchange with the returnees from the other camps. In Tembe they had a lot of action and we were almost a little jealous. We had lunch at Mtuba in a small restaurant, along with the couple who went to Mkuzi and Antoine, our new monitor. He is great, we are happy, he explains well, takes his time and sees everything. He loves photography and is eager to learn as much as possible from Manfred.

Our camp is very, very simple, the rooms are the same cells, have no cabinets or racks, but they are still too new and are waiting to be supplemented, for that they have charm and look as if they were made with love. We have a lovely covered terrace right in front of the kitchen that invites you to sit, if only plastic table and chairs allow to eat and chat outside. From the camp you can see directly on the Imfolozi, on our rock we experienced the first morning a magnificent sunrise, during which two of the rare black rhinos crossed the river. Already on the first two rides we saw many more animals than in the whole fourteen days in Mkuzi. Elephants, rhinos of both varieties, a cheetah and of course the wild dog noodle, which consists of ten adults and seven four-month young dogs.

We already have almost half of our time here in iMfolozi behind us. Unfortunately, the weather has not spoiled us, the weather forecast for the next few days are not much better and we are not much richer in cat sightings. But the landscape and the wildlife in general is fantastic and varied and the rides accordingly ingenious. We also enjoy that everything is a little more structured



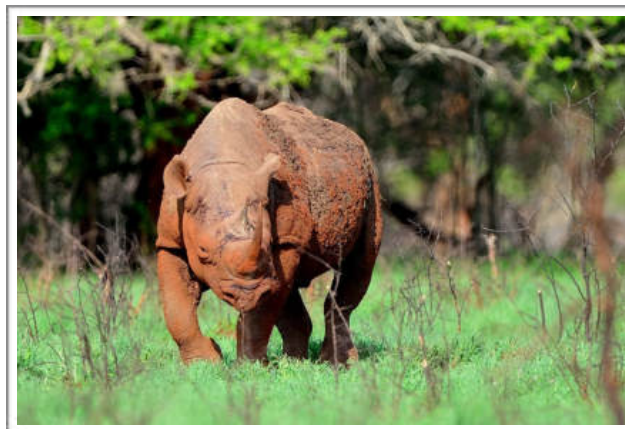
and quiet, Antoine does that excellently, is both a good leader and a really competent guide, but above all he has a sunny manner and always a joke and a



laugh ready.

Despite a bit of holiday mood, we also worked a bit: the sighted dogs were determined based on the photos, many new pictures of the juveniles and the sighted Cheetas made and processed so that they are suitable for the ID sheets, photo traps with new batteries and memory cards fitted. Here a quick, uncomplicated thing.

Yesterday we experienced two funny events with black rhinos. The first one was my fault, luckily it ended with laughter and not a crushed car: two massive buffalo bulls blocked the road and caught the eye. A few meters beside us stood

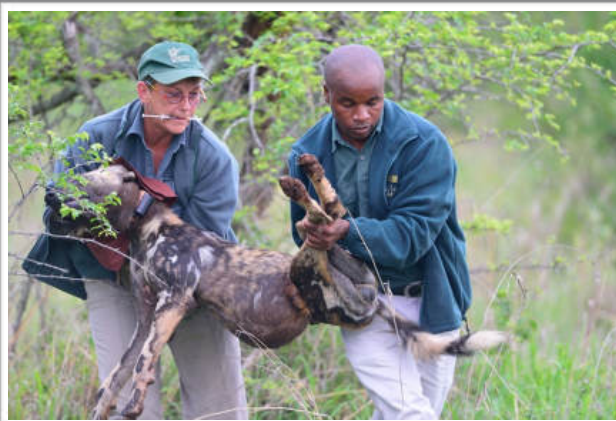


a black rhino. I reported as ordered: black rhino at four o'clock. The times are given as an indication where everyone will find it. Unfortunately I mistook it - as it happens to all over and over again, since we are not very accustomed to calculate this so, four o'clock with eight o'clock and everybody searched on the right. Antoine got a little startled when he saw Rhino so close on the left side.

Fortunately, it seemed contented and was not about to attack us, as these little and more aggressive pachyderms often do.

A few miles further we discovered a mother with a calf that seemed very small to us. It lay on the ground, then got up for a moment and drank a bit of milk with Mommy before lying down again. We went to the Centenary Center for lunch and drove back the same way. The calf was still in the same place, the mother seemed to be guarding it. Antoine wondered if the calf was in bad shape and the volunteers confirmed these thoughts, they saw the creature staggering and falling ... Now Antoine tried to reach someone from the management, but that, being Saturday, was not succeeded. So we went to J.P., Cilla's ex-boyfriend, who is employed here as an animal catcher for all antelopes. He follows us to the crime scene - where we found a rather large calf, which set off with his mother on the way. Neither reeling nor wavering, everything was OK, and turned to the black clouds that promised a big thunderstorm and a wet ride home.

*Black rhino*





Once again everything looked grimmer than it was and we actually reached the camp dry. The evening then brought a thunderstorm, which, however, was neither very strong nor to take photos of the lightning.

Today, Sunday, we have another office day, photos are viewed and processed, identifications made, and all the observation data from the other priority types surveyed is transferred to the computer. As long as we did not get a phone from someone on the road, a cat was spotted and we should come quickly to identify them. In the evening, we are cooking and there will be bush maggots, that is, Äplermagronen with Boerewors ...