Jermo van Bijsterveldt, Photography Volunteer, The Netherlands
Here at Dumela another month has disappeared like magic. And that is because once again things have been action packed. The continued cooler weather has meant that predators have remained active, leading to an increased number of sightings.

Our new local resident wild dog pack has continued to make appearances and their 13 pups are becoming more curious and comfortable around the vehicle. This has led to gaining better images of the whole pack and discovering that the alpha is in fact an individual we have seen previously in another reserve, a fantastic discovery for our research project.

We got a welcome surprise this month during a visit to the hyena den we monitor when suddenly one of the adults pulled out a 4 week old cub from the den! Its undeniable cuteness has certainly made waves in dispelling some of the negative associations surrounding hyenas for our volunteers.

Not only that, leopards have made a strong appearance this month with no fewer than 6 seen in a single 24 hours. We think that has to be a new record!
Unsuspectingly, we drove through one of the reserves on a Monday morning with Yuka as our guide. The focus of this game drive was giraffes. We were aiding research, helping them gather new ID kit photographs in order to research giraffe social interactions in more depth. However, I must admit, the focus in my head was on staying awake. We had seen a few giraffes and photographed them for the researchers when we suddenly saw wild dog pups running on our left. The week before we had also seen wild dog pups, but they had run away from us and we had not see them again. This time it was different. Yuka drove through the bush to get closer to the wild dog pups.

It was difficult to get them but Yuka manoeuvred her way carefully through the bush. When we finally arrived in a part where there were fewer trees, Yuka stopped the jeep. We could see the wild dog pups well from a distance. It turned out to be no less than 10. The wild dog pups looked relaxed compared to our last meeting. And the meeting only got better. Curious as they are, the wild dogs pups walked towards our jeep. They were getting closer. Eventually they stopped a few meters in front of us and stood there for a while. The photographer in me became enthusiastic and took dozens if not hundreds of photos.
They positioned themselves perfectly in front of my lens and hardly moved. And although they were largely in the shade, the warm sunlight fell on their beautiful fur. Their eyes also caught the sunlight, something our photography teacher Sophie always talks about.

After a few minutes, they ran back to where they came from. Yuka started the jeep and followed them. We arrived in a more open area and saw the wild dogs pups hanging around a hill. Yuka said that this is probably their den and she was very happy that she had discovered this. The wild dogs pups ran around and played with each other. At a certain moment a number of pups lay together in the sunlight, as if they asked if I wanted to make a group portrait of them. Of course I wanted that. This was also the place where we saw two adult wild dogs. Probably the father and the mother of the pups. As if this sighting wasn't enough, I also captured photographs of beautifully colourful birds in between capturing the dogs.

Eventually I put down my camera, which is sometimes quite difficult for me, and I fully enjoyed the wild dogs, the birds, the sunlight and the beautiful surroundings in which I found myself. At that moment you feel how special it is that you can experience this. This was certainly my best Monday.
The Greater Kruger region of South Africa experiences severe unemployment, with 15-24 year olds making up 70% of all those unemployed in Mpumalanga. The cycle of poor education, poverty and health issues create an environment in which communities struggle to escape.

Even if the youth in the area receive an education they are often without the skills to be able to get jobs and create a stable income. This further contributes to the unemployment in the area and an increase in poverty levels. Our goal is to equip young adults to theoretically and practically apply their skills to a career and identify and establish entrepreneurial opportunities. We will create a community garden to help local community members sustain themselves and their families and increase income generation.

To help out, visit: africanimpactfoundation.org/donate

COMMUNITY FOCUS

GRACE REGAN
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP INTERN FROM ENGLAND

After completing the second year of my Psychology degree, I was eager to gain some work experience. I had been offered a job back home, and while my head told me to take it, my heart said AFRICA. My thoughts immediately turned to African Impact as my experience in Zambia, 2018 was so incredible. I did some research and was pleasantly surprised to find the Social Development and Entrepreneurship Internship here in Kruger. This was the perfect opportunity for me!

My first week was full of animals, new people and fun! While I am an avid animal lover, I came to realise that I know very little about them. I was pleased to have the opportunity to join the researchers on game drives and see incredible species and sights and learn about the wonders of South Africa. I was also involved in a colour run fundraiser for Farmers of the Future.

Then the real work started. I was given the opportunity to style my internship project around my needs, as well as the needs of the community. My main responsibility has been to assist in the development of the Farmers of the Future program. This program is currently going through some exciting changes and I feel lucky to be a part of the development. I worked closely with the participants on the program and while I helped them to develop business skills, they taught me a lot about agriculture. I also focused on the recruitment of new participants and created fun, interactive workshops for a youth centre and high school.
I hope that my work will encourage local individuals to join the program and have a small impact on unemployment in the area.

I have also been very lucky to work with some incredible organisations during the community partner outreach. I think it is amazing that African Impact reaches out to local organisations to give us both an opportunity to grow together. At Nourish, I was involved in the construction of a maze which was made from recycled bottles. At Hklokomela I had the opportunity to plant seeds, which when grown will be sold to raise money for women's health.

Although my time here is nearly over, the impact this internship has had on me will last a life time. I only hope that I have made an impact on the people I have worked with.
**Photography Reflections**

**Patience.** That little word your mother would utter to you when you were desperate for something to happen as a child. That little word that would often only lead to frustration and annoyance. However, patience is an undeniable need when it comes to photography and it certainly paid off for me during a recent visit to Kruger National Park.

**We’d been driving through the park** for several hours and were attempting to make our way down to Skukuza before turning around and heading back towards the Orpen gate. We had been doing quite well for sightings with no fewer than 58 different species already seen... yes, we were keeping a list! Somewhere between Tshokwane and Skukuza, one of the people in our car suddenly exclaimed, “new species, there’s a klipspringer on that rock!” And sure enough, on a large rock by the side of the road, two klipspringers stood with their backs to us. I snapped a few photos but both myself and the other photographer in the car were eager to get a photograph of them looking at us. After all, klipspringers are not often so still and close to the road. And so, the waiting game began. After several minutes, the klipspringers still had not looked at us, their gaze firmly fixed on the horizon of the koppie behind them. Grumblings were beginning from the other members of our car about being stuck with ‘picky photographers’. Despite this, myself and the other photographer were determined to get our shot.

**Another couple of minutes passed,** when suddenly, one of the grumblers, by now scanning the horizon with her binoculars, suddenly shouted “guys, there’s a leopard on the top of that koppie!”
And there was indeed a leopard, right on the horizon at the top of the koppie. We watched for the next 20 minutes as the leopard slowly made its way down and to our delight we discovered two little cubs following. The cars piled up around us, also eager to see our discovery. Eventually the little family made its way to the bottom of the koppie and rewarded our patience by drinking from the little pool at the base before calmly moving on.

Ultimately, if it hadn't been for those klipspringers and a mixture of ‘photographer pickiness’ and all important patience we would never have seen those leopards and we would all still be waiting to see our first leopard cubs. Now of course, it goes without saying that patience doesn't always pay off. Sometimes it leads to nothing. Thankfully in this case, it did and for all the times patience doesn't pay off, it only serves to make the times when it does all the sweeter.
The most successful large carnivore in Africa, spotted hyenas are both proficient hunters and scavengers. They are the only mammal that has the ability to digest bone, meaning that they can extract calcium not available to other mammals. They have exceptional senses, with their sense of smell so good that they are able to follow scent trails that are up to 3 days old. They live in matriarchal societies, with all females, including cubs, outranking even the most high ranking male. The clan centres around a communal den where all of the females will keep their young, safe from potential predators.

**Animal of the Month:**

**SPOTTED HYENA**

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**PHOTOGRAPHY FOCUS**

**Clemens Lukasser**

Photography Volunteer from Austria

Although we have been able to capture images in colour for quite a long time now, black and white photography is still very common. But why do we still use it, when there is a possibility to represent happenings in a way that comes closer to reality?

Like Ted Grant once said: “When you photograph people in colour, you photograph their clothes. But when you photograph people in black and white, you photograph their souls!“.

From my point of view it depends on what you want to express within an image. Sometimes the colour can even distract from that. If you take out the colour out of the picture, you take out a stylistic mean. In this way there is more space for the observer to interpret. There are more questions left open. For me, I have found that portraits work very well in black in white, as the lack of colour allows the viewer to focus much more on the expression of the face, their mimic or emotions. Furthermore, relationships between characters in the image are often much better represented without any colour.
When it comes to photographing animals, black and white as a tool can be used in a lot of different ways to get interesting images. I personally love to present elephants or rhinos in black and white, in order to draw attention to all of the structure in their skin. Black and white can also add atmosphere and drama to an image by emphasising rim-lighting or drawing attention to specific areas of light, shadow, dust or haze. I know many people would say it is much easier to take good pictures when the light falls directly on the subject, but I do not think that this is always true in every situation. I believe you can often get much more interesting shots when the light source is behind the object, throwing a shadow towards you. I do not necessarily believe that there are better or worse light conditions, there are just different ones and if you learn to work with light rather than fight it, you can make the most of every situation. For me, black and white can only emphasise this and I love it as it has the ability to express so much.
Here in the Greater Kruger, we rely on fundraising to support our projects through the African Impact Foundation. Our foundation interns are invaluable to us in this endeavour, working tirelessly in conjunction with both our projects and the foundation itself, organising fun events that raise funds for both our research and community projects.

Recently, we have welcomed Zoe, our newest Foundation intern, to the crazy family that we have here! Zoe will be staying with us for two months, undertaking her own important work and taking part in all aspects of the projects here, from community to conservation. One of her main roles whilst she is here will be to help assist us with launching our newest research fundraiser, called ‘Adopt a Camera Trap’. Zoe will be invaluable in helping promote the scheme both on-site as well as on social media, helping to spread the word and get people as excited as we all are about this scheme!

We talk about camera traps a lot here, and that's because they are so crucial to have for our conservation research projects. This is because they allow us access to rare and elusive species, opening up a whole new world of research possibilities. However, they are not cheap items of equipment, and often animals such as hyenas like to munch on them, so it is important that we can make sure we always have enough. However, it can be hard to engage people from outside with the work that our camera traps do, and so our Adopt a Camera Trap scheme aims to get everyone involved, whether you’re with us physically or not!
This fundraiser plays on the idea of ‘adopting’ an animal, except this time, you can adopt a camera trap! The idea is that adopters can either pay a monthly or one off lifetime fee, and receive rewards in return, such as a certificate, a letter of thanks, and updates throughout the year on the camera traps, including pictures and articles written by staff, interns and volunteers here about how, where and why the camera traps have been used. Lifetime donors will cover the cost of a camera trap kit, and for this can also name a camera trap and get personalised updates on their individual camera traps – pretty cool, right? We’re super excited to get this running with the help of Zoe, and we look forward to taking you along on our camera trap journey with us.

Current Fundraiser
Check out and share the Farmers of the Future Fundraiser

Facebook
You can also check out Facebook for our latest updates

Book Your Place on Project
If you would like to volunteer with us you can get in touch with Nicole who will be able to tell you all about all of the wonderful projects we have on offer and answer any questions you may have. Book your front row seat: Nicole@africanimpact.com
My decision to have a 6 months sabbatical from my business back in the UK found me wanting to do something completely different from my day to day life. Africa has always been a special place close to my heart, so where best to spend my 8 weeks volunteering on a Big 5 conservation project than with African Impact based in Greater Kruger, South Africa.

My favourite animal has always been the elephant. However, since being in South Africa I have a new found love for many more and one animal in particular being the rhino. The amazing knowledge and experience from the guides and research team here at AI has opened my eyes to the poaching facts and figures, especially with the rhinos and how endangered they are and now the focus being on de-horning for their own protection. So, with the above in mind I was very keen to see a rhino first hand in the wild.

My first sighting of a rhino happened to be a black male rhino at night which was not a great visual so I was desperate for a day time sighting. My focus became a slight obsession and actually took me 4 weeks & 2 days from when I first arrived to see these amazing creatures up close and personal in full daylight. It was well worth the wait as this time I saw a black rhino cow with her 2 calves. We kept our distance but they were in full view so I manged to admire the group from 20 metres away. The cow was naturally protective of her calves.
These rhino are still horned so the mother can protect her calves. With more reserves starting the de-horning process I feel I was lucky to see a black rhino with horns as I believe my grand-children won't get this experience - but I do hope they will. I visited Kruger National Park a couple of weeks ago and was thrilled to have a sighting of another rhino. This time it was a white rhino, but it had been de-horned. It was an incredible sighting seen within a dry riverbed. One of the reserves we are lucky enough to visit weekly have in recent months de-horned approx. 200 rhinos in a mission to support anti-poaching. I believe this rhino I saw in Kruger came from this other reserve.

I have been asked what impact I believe I have whilst volunteering out here in South Africa and does it make a difference? I believe I do make a difference. The knowledge I have gained I can take back to the UK and educate others. The research we collect here at AI is passed onto other partner organisations for the protection of many of the African animals, not just the Big 5 we hear so much about. All animals are worth protecting.

My time has here been so worthwhile and I have enjoyed my experience. The people I have met are so determined to continue to make a difference and with that in mind, THANK YOU and I will be back!
Growing up in small town USA, you have an overload of time to go outdoors and explore with little opportunity to do much of anything else. Living out in “the middle of nowhere” you spend most of your childhood running around like a wild child in the middle of the woods barefoot or on a four-wheeler (ATV), with your fluffy four-legged companion at your side. It was never uncommon for me to return home covered in mud after getting stuck deep in some trail and not being allowed back in the house till I had rinsed off with the ice cold hose out back.

Back at home, I am a full-time student at Edinboro University majoring in wildlife biology and a minor in environmental issues. I work part time at a doggy daycare and boarding facility where I spend my time outside with the dogs exercising them no matter the weather. It is still not uncommon for the dogs and I not to be allowed back inside until we rinse off all the mud in the ice cold hose out back. I also volunteer my weekends at our local dog shelter taking care of the furry companions waiting to find a home. I have always felt a deep connection to animals and wanting to advocate for them. Nearing the end of my degree, now a senior, I needed to look for an internship to do and none of the wildlife internships back in the states were
RESEARCH FOCUS

really offering what I was looking for. I had already volunteered in Thailand taking care of abused elephants from the tourist and logging industry and I was eager to go abroad once again. This led me to looking for African internships and AI popped up.

I was interested in doing my internship on human-wildlife conflict, low and behold one of the reserves we do research at, Balule, has a railway running right through it. Balule is an APNR which essentially means it’s a private reserve that has dropped its fences and is open to Kruger National Park. Whatever you can find in Kruger (Big 5, Magnificent 7, and way more) you can find in Balule and they are all subject to crossing over this dangerous railway. Therefore, my project has focused on which large mammals are being seen within 50m of the railway track and what vegetation they are being associated with. This example of human wildlife conflict has not been studied often, with only limited studies of purely large mammals being undertaken in a few countries. Once we can determine which species are primarily affected by the trains, mitigation strategies can begin to be drawn up to help minimize this threat.

I have a little less than two weeks left in my three-month internship spending my days collecting data on drives, running statistical tests on my data, writing my research paper, and trying to ignore the fact that I have to leave this beautiful place so soon. Being able to work on something so important locally but that can also be applied worldwide, especially since little research has been done on railway ecology, is an amazing opportunity. I have had an awesome support system here making me feel at home and part of the team, always having guidance whenever I got lost in my project and guides pouring with knowledge constantly there to lend a hand. I couldn’t have asked for more.
As we continue to monitor the reintroduction success of the lions on Rietspruit we are seeing an incredible story unfold. The five lions that were brought on to the reserve a year ago are now seven with possibly more on the way! This is certainly a positive sign for the animals adjusting properly to their new surroundings.

Though the lions have successfully reproduced, there was a bit of a rocky start for the first born cubs of this pride. Initially one of the cubs was seen hanging around with the male lions. It was exciting at first to see that the big males had accepted the little one. However, over time the reserve management realized they had a problem on their hands. After several days, the mother lioness had not returned to the cub, who still needed to nurse. Unable to eat solid food at the time, the young cub was beginning to starve. The little one was even seen trying to suckle from the male lions’ tummies.

The Rietspruit reserve management ended up making an executive decision. They would intervene by trying to relocate the starving cub back to the den site where the mother lioness might find her. This was done with great care as the management waited for the male lions to leave the cub. Once it was alone the Rietspruit team cautiously approached, wrapped the cub in a blanket, and placed it in a bucket for transport. That same night the cub was relocated to the den site. Then all the team could do was play the waiting game.

Sometime after the cub’s relocation, the lionesses were seen back at the den site. The family had been reunited, and to our surprise there was a second cub that had been with mom the whole time! There was a noticeable size difference in the two cubs due to the fact that one had not been feeding recently. However, over the next few months the lost cub, who came to be known as Bucket, caught up in size. Bucket is believed to be a female and the other cub; a male.
Life seems to be continuing on smoothly for the lions of Rietspruit. With the cubs now several months old, their chances of surviving into adulthood are increasing. At the moment we are waiting for the next episode of the saga to begin as it appears that the other female lioness is now pregnant. As we continue to observe their incredible life story we hope the new additions to the family will have a less dramatic start.
The tree snake, or Boomslang in Afrikaans, is a beautiful snake made even more special for its uniqueness within its evolutionary tree. The Colubridae family contains over 51% of all snake species and are found on every continent except Antarctica. Despite the large variety of this family, the Boomslang is unique within its genus Dispholidus and one of the very few colubrids capable of producing venom strong enough to be dangerous to humans.

Despite being one of Southern Africa’s most venomous snakes, there have been only seven deaths recorded between 1957 and 2011. The main reason for this is the Boomslang’s secretive arboreal nature and its preference to avoid conflict rather than to react aggressively. These snakes will only bite when feeling extremely threatened and would much rather flee to the cover of thick grass or trees than bite its harasser.

When it does bite however, it delivers it's venom via three grooved fangs found at the rear of the mouth, just below each eye. The small size of the fangs and their position in the mouth often mean that Boomslang bites are often ‘dry bites’, with no venom injected, however this is no reason to disregard the seriousness of any Boomslang bite. Boomslang venom is haemotoxic, which means that it effects the blood. It is often said the venom prevents blood clotting, but the truth is much more complicated and interesting than that. The venom actually promotes clotting, causing the body to create a large amount of ‘micro-clots’ within the blood and in doing so uses up the bodies supply of clotting proteins and platelets. This can cause haemorrhages in the heart, lungs and brain, as well as other muscles, eventually resulting in death. Luckily the venom is relatively slow acting and so provides a big window to acquire anti-venom and the necessary treatment which often involves blood transfusions.

Much of what we know about the symptoms of Boomslang venom is thanks to herpetologist Karl Schmidt. In 1957 Schmidt was bitten by a juvenile that he believed was unable to produce the necessary amount of venom to be fatal. He made periodic notes of his symptoms, even refusing treatment which he thought would interfere with the symptoms he was recording, until shortly before his death.
We also know quite a lot about the Boomslangs behaviour despite its secretive nature. Highly arboreal, Boomslangs are often found in the branches of trees and large thorny bushes where they hunt prey like small birds and bird eggs and small rodents as well as other arboreal reptiles such as chameleons. They are highly adapted to this lifestyle, with large round eyes providing excellent eyesight, and are also one of the few snakes with colour vision. Their own colouration, shades of green and browns in males, and typically brown in females, also acts as camouflage as they hunt amongst branches and leaves.

Despite the fear held by many people of these snakes they are a fantastic sight to witness in the bush and a fascinating creature that only seems to get more interesting the more we learn about it.
“We were on a morning drive and the sun was just coming up. It was a stunning sunrise and we suddenly noticed a herd of giraffes grazing in this open plain area where we then stopped. We watched them enjoy breakfast while we ourselves were still rubbing the sleep out of our eyes. Suddenly they began to move off, all walking in the same direction towards some trees. It was a lovely start to an early morning.”

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