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Community Focus
Photography
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Renske Breur, Photography Volunteer, Netherlands
Another month has flown by so fast. We have been treated to many great predator sightings; one of the highlights being a pack of wild dogs chasing a kudu into water. As we hadn't seen them for a while before that, we assumed they might have moved on but we're happy that they're still around. We were also lucky with great lion, hyena and leopard sightings. What more can you wish for?

This month we had a very successful collaboration between the photography and research teams. We gathered a lot of data and great photos to learn more about the behaviour from many animals. This month, our focus was on giraffes, rhinos, predators and nocturnal species.

We also had a lot of success and fun with our fundraisers supporting our community and research projects. Find out more about Dumela Portraits, light painting, baking cup cakes and drumming nights!

Finally, Summer has arrived at Dumela Lodge with the rains bringing back many insects - and birds are also on their way. We're excited to see what the next weeks hold in store!
You never know when it will be your lucky day on an African game drive. It could be on your first day, in your third week or in your second month. For me it was in the very beginning of week 3 as a photography volunteer at African Impact.

On a crisp Monday morning our photography group of six split up to join the AI researcher team on their mission to update giraffe ID kits in a nearby reserve. We headed out with our guide Josh and quickly spotted 3-4 dozen vultures in the trees. Click, click! A few giraffes show themselves from behind bushes and played hide and seek with my camera. We record data and are off again.

Soon after comes another special moment with the sighting of a black male rhino. Alex, a volunteer from England, had been hoping to see her first black rhino for six weeks with the AI research team. Having seen only one so far, I was just as hopeful, especially because of how endangered rhinos have become due to poaching.
Satisfied with our rhino photos we're off again, but quickly stop for a herd of buffalo. Two buffalo lock horns arguing, and two others kick up dust mating. In the backdrop, waterbuck pose perfectly still and backlit; impala leap about, and a few shy giraffes give us the eye. Then...radio news of wild dogs not far away. Off we race.

One jeep is already near the pack. We creep in for a closer look: a rare sighting of colourful adults and pups lounging. Josh, our guide relays how lucky this sighting is. He’s seen wild dogs only 3-4 times in his entire career. Curious heads pop up when an engine starts and one dog rolls in the dirt for a back rub. We give a third jeep an opportunity to move in for a better view and we move on. No chance to put my camera down because we encounter a family of three rhinos just off the road.

A lucky day, for sure. But it doesn't end here and I'm excited to see what the last days will bring!
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

DOWEY BAOTHMAN
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP INTERN FROM SAUDI ARABIA

After graduating magna cum laude from Hult Business School in August 2019 with a degree in entrepreneurship, I decided to join African Impact in order to give back. My main interest was to help underprivileged people to achieve more through social development, which is why I joined this award winning social & business development internship. My motto is “leave it better than you found it”, which has been a constant theme throughout my experience here at African Impact.

During my internship I worked a lot on the Farmers of the Future project, which mainly focused on contributing to lesson plans such as Marketing, and Trends & Markets as well as developing a questionnaire for data collection. We also sought to gain the trust of the community, learn their needs, and have positive engagement with them.

In South Africa, the unemployment rate for youth aged 15-24 is 55.2% and only about 2 or 3 students graduate high school with passing grades each year. In fact, many of the students disappear in the community after finishing school. We believed this was due to the lack of exposure and understanding of how their environment works. Therefore, we knew that our strategy had to be effective at implementing the core values of African Impact.
During my stay, I worked alongside open-minded and motivated individuals. We worked together as a collective to create change and impact the surrounding rural communities. Johann lead us in engaging activities that enabled us to not only see what these communities needed but also how we could be of assistance. Johann introduced us to various projects focused on enhancing children’s education by providing after-school activities. We assisted by improving their facilities and working hands-on alongside local employees and other volunteers.

My experience working with Farmers of the Future and the Reading Club for children was so transformative. It taught me how to affect change in a community in a hands-on way. I loved the program so much that I decided to extend my stay with Africa Impact. After my time with African Impact, I am absolutely certain that I “left it better than we found it.”
As a wildlife photographer there is an inherent question that hangs over us at all times. This is a question that I have touched upon in previous articles. Now, we spend as much time as we possibly can out in the field; it’s never as much time as we would like, but nonetheless, we crave being out in the bush, surrounded by the world we love, waiting (sometimes) patiently for that perfect shot. And most are lucky enough to end up with a catalogue of great (not always perfect) photographs as a result. But here comes the question...what do we do with these images? After all, there is no point in them gathering dust on a hard drive for years to come.

Photography is a very self-indulgent art form. There is no changing that. After all, for most, it is about you, and your experience of a sighting, and your desire to share this with the world. But can we do more? Can we use our images in a way that doesn’t just stroke our carefully crafted ego?

Inevitably, the answer for me to this question is simple. Of course you can. It is a question and an answer that underlines all of my teaching here on the conservation and wildlife photography project in the Greater Kruger. I am always telling my volunteers that they should use the photographs they take as impactfully as possibly, whether it be to educate, glorify an animal, raise funds, to support conservation initiatives, the list goes on. It is this that separates the wildlife photographers from conservation wildlife photographers.

Whilst volunteers normally find it pretty easy to think and see how their photographs impact the photography and our sister projects here in the Greater Kruger, they often need a little more help in seeing what they can accomplish with their photography once they go back home.
They can of course, see that they can offer their images to conservation organisations or scientific organisations but what many often forget about is fundraising, and how you could possibly use photography to fundraise.

Whilst they are on project, they take part in two photography fundraisers through which they help us raise money to support the African Impact Foundation, our charity arm that provides extra vital support to certain projects such as Farmers of the Future and our camera trap research project. For one fundraiser, they create a photo booth with lots of silly props and use this at one of our sundowner events to photograph people when they are all together. These photographs are a fantastic memory of their time with us and these photographs are available for purchase after the event. This event is always great fun, and everybody gets involved. Towards the end of their stay they take part in a second fundraiser which is light painting. Light painting is (in very simple terms) taking a long exposure photograph and playing around with torches and different colour lights. It is great fun and once I have taught them the basic techniques around light painting, I leave them and the other volunteers to be creative and experiment. Once again, any photographs volunteers want, they can purchase for a small fee afterwards. Of course, these are not just events or techniques they can use whilst they are here, they can take these ideas home and host fun events with their friends and families.

These are just two ideas they can use but there is a long list of possibilities if this isn’t their thing. They could host a photo viewing party (where people pay a small entry fee), sell prints at a gallery event or host a photo raffle.

For me, there is never any excuse to not use your photography in the most positive and impactful way possible. It is about taking command of your images, knowing what you want to accomplish and occasionally, being a little creative.
During the breeding season, Southern Yellow-Billed Hornbills form incredibly strong relationships. Females won’t even leave their nests to breed and it’s the male’s task to bring food through a tiny hole in the nest made out of the female’s feathers (she isn’t even able to fly anymore at that point). A few weeks after the chicks hatch out of their eggs, the female will leave and close the nest. When the new-born are old and strong enough (after roughly another month), they will make a hole in the nest and learn to survive from their parents.

Photography enables us to capture a moment otherwise gone. This is the reason why I love photography. I can always go back to a particular moment and show other people how this moment felt to me and how I see the world through my lens and how beautiful every spot in the world can be from the right angle and with the right settings. Although this is not always easy... especially during a night drive.

Night drives can be experienced differently: exciting, scary, magical, but most of the time a bit stressful due to the light, or lack of it.

Firstly, you cannot really see during the drive except for the small area which is lighted by the flashlight, this means that at any second an animal can jump out of the bush or can suddenly appear lying on the road. This is, on the one hand, kind of creepy because you never know what happens but on the other hand, very exciting and the reason why every night drive is unique. For us photographers, this means we always have to be prepared and have the right settings for this specific light situation.
Initially, this would be a low shutter speed, which leads to the problem that you have to have a very steady hand, or the animals should lay still, in the best case. But especially during a night drive you see the animals very suddenly and you are very excited and cannot always be very still.

For example, you have seen a lion, but then he walks out of the light and you cannot see him anymore which can make you very nervous because you know he has to be somewhere, but you do not know where. But in particular this is what sets a night drive apart from a normal drive: you have a difficult light situation, cannot see much and need settings that are not easy to handle.

The easiest way to cope with this is to stay calm and be prepared for everything. Therefore, it is important to know your camera and know which settings are necessary for which light situation. Every camera is different, which is the reason why settings can vary between cameras and it can take some time till you get the perfect night shot.

But to reach this, the general most important things are to always be prepared and be able to switch your settings very fast, to have a low shutter speed, be very still, have a low aperture to enable as much light to reach the sensor and a high ISO, which depends on the camera, but it should not be too high so you can avoid too much noise.

Although there are many things to be considered when doing night photography, it is still one of the most exciting types of photography where anything can happen at any time – and you should always be ready!
Our research foundation projects are continuing to go strongly this month! The funds raised from these projects have enabled us to buy new SD cards for our camera traps, meaning that we were able to replace some older SD cards that had been temperamental and starting to break. Our next aim is to look at replacing batteries, as many of our rechargeable batteries are starting to have a very short shelf life.

Using foundation donations, we have been able to test Li-Ion batteries, which have been lasting months – making camera trap research quicker and more reliable! This helps us collect more accurate data, which can be used to gain insight into the lives of many of the species we have been capturing, including the rare and elusive brown hyena.

At the time of writing, next week our very own research team are holding a bake sale at Hoedspruit Farmers Market to raise funds needed for items such as these batteries. We will be putting our organisational and baking skills to the test, making cupcakes and bakes to sell to the general public!

Hopefully this will be a fun day which will allow us to raise not just money but also awareness for the research that we are undertaking here at African Impact. Watch this space to see how this venture goes!
Fundraising can be a tricky beast, especially on the ground. Most successful fundraising generally has some enticing factor alongside the actual destination for the funds raised. There seems to be an interesting dichotomy between raising money for a cause but also making the event fun and interesting to be at, which seems to make the financial donation more appealing. So how do we make it fun?

Within our Community Engagement Projects our African Impact Foundation project is Farmers of the Future (FotF). FotF is a business training program through small holder agriculture. The project also works with high schools alongside their Agriculture Curriculum to provide the physical training component and also supports local community projects through financial training and growing vegetables either for sale or subsistence. As good a cause as this is, we still need events around the fundraising to gain awareness.

Our main fundraising event for FotF is our Djembe Drumming night. Once a month Bianca from Beat Bound Drumming, spends an amazing evening with us teaching the basics of Djembe drumming around the fire in a massive drum circle. Each evening is met with amazing attendance and joy as she takes the circle through ancient tales of drumming, various drumming rhythms and patterns, and a cheeky sing along to The Lion Sleeps Tonight (by Tight Fit). We love it, the volunteers love it, and we raised much needed funding!

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
A few months after that decision, I finally arrived at Hoedspruit Airport. I immediately got immersed into the easy-going lifestyle South Africa is known for. The airport, if you could even call it that, was tiny and the typical ‘airport rush’ was nowhere to be found. I was welcomed by a friendly staff member and a few other new volunteers who had just been picked up. Together we waited for the tractor to bring in my luggage. After I had fetched my bag, we made our way to Dumela Lodge, my home for the next 6 weeks. On the way there, I was already greeted by the local welcome committee; baboons, warthogs, giraffes and lots of impalas.

My first few days at the lodge flew by. On Sunday, I met the staff members, the other volunteers and of course the resident vervet monkeys. All of them, except for the monkeys, were very friendly and welcoming. Having to chase away the monkeys from the breakfast area every morning, didn’t exactly make them any fonder of me.

“**If you can visit two continents, visit Africa twice.**” That is exactly what I did. Eight years ago, I set foot on South African soil for the first time. My family and I travelled from Johannesburg to Cape Town and along the way I got to know lots about the South African culture and the local wildlife. As you have probably already figured out by now, I immediately fell under the spell of this beautiful country.

**At the beginning of 2019, I finally made the decision to travel to South Africa again.** I would turn 21 in May, graduate college in June and start my first real teaching job in September. However, I felt the need to catch my breath before joining ‘the adult life’. To me, South Africa seemed to be the perfect place to detox from the rush and stress which are inherent to life in modern western society. I am not even sure if the words ‘rush’ and ‘stress’ can be found in an African dictionary.

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Monday was a day full of information. After we had introduced ourselves, the staff introduced the entire project. From research to the community projects and safety measures, they told us all about it. Somehow, they didn't lose my attention even once. Adding loads of humour and leaving room for us to ask questions, did the trick. On Tuesday, the real work began.

During my time as a research volunteer, I had many great animal encounters. There were two encounters which left me speechless. The first one took place during our overnight stay at Balule. Balule is a game reserve which is part of the Greater Kruger. After one of our night drives we got back to camp only to find that three elephants had entered the camp site. I will never forget sitting on a deck, watching the elephants feeding right in front of us with a full moon in the background.

The second encounter took place at a game reserve we visit regularly. During a quiet night drive, we suddenly heard that there had been a predator sighting. We knew not to get our hopes up too much, but still the adrenaline kicked in. We headed to the location of the sighting. When got there, we found a leopard resting next to a water hole. Usually leopard sightings are rather momentarily, but this time we were lucky enough to observe the mighty animal for over 45 minutes. On top of that, a pack of mongooses and two rhinos came to drink at the water hole and entered the sighting. To make it even more magical, all of this happened during sunset.

Volunteering with African Impact has been one of the best decisions I have ever made. For me it was a great way to catch my breath and at the same time it feels as if you really are contributing to wildlife conservation. Being a volunteer with African Impact is informative, breath-taking and of course, great fun.
Hi, I’m Dan and I am one of the research interns at African Impact, staying at Dumela Lodge near the Kruger National Park. I am halfway through my internship already and loving every minute of it. The only downside is being far away from my girlfriend Lauren, who I have no doubt would love to experience this with me. That being said, Dumela Lodge has become a family away from home, with some very caring people looking out for every one of us.

I initially came here with the intention to look at giraffe behavior, but quickly realized that there were so many other opportunities to investigate. After my first week, my love for birds was rekindled and I was happy to shift my focus towards the African fish eagle, that iconic bird that helps define the African bush with its distinctive call. I am working through all the data that AI has collected over the past four years, and quickly becoming engrossed in the information about where these magnificent birds like to hang out. I am hopeful that my research can lead to a better understanding of what is happening to the local population and help the reserve out in keeping these wonderful birds of prey in the area.
My day starts off typically at 5:30am - nice and early which was challenging at first but trust me, well worth it for the morning drives in one of the three reserves we visit which is great way to see the wildlife waking up. With a variety of game drives, overnight camping trips, data entry and community projects to fill up my week, meaning it swings by super-fast but there is never a dull moment.

In my time left here I will work closely with the social dynamics and mapping of the white and black rhinoceros's in one of the reserves we visit. I plan to look at existing data collected by previous interns and pair it with recent data I will collect. I also will be working on a ‘mini’ project creating graphs and tables using previous data taken on our lovely fruit bats who live just outside our front door here at Dumela Lodge.

I have two months left here in this beautiful province of South Africa, many more research drives, many more community projects and many more adventures to be had.

To properly understand population densities and distributions of leopards we must conduct camera trap surveys, record spoor and signs of predator presence.

Ultimately, this focused research is vital to the good development of sustainable conservation solutions that will protect the future of this iconic apex predator.

Sign up for regular giving or a one-off donation below to help support the protection and better understanding of leopards in Southern Africa.

globalgiving.org/projects/leopard-research/
While we work on conservation of many highly endangered species here at Dumela Lodge, there is one species of whose plight we are reminded every single day and whose threats are particularly acute; the rhinoceros. Threatened by poaching for their horn, rhinos face an uphill battle for survival as a species. We are extremely privileged here to be able to observe both black and white rhinos on a regular basis, and to contribute towards anti-poaching efforts through our monitoring and reporting, thus doing our part to conserve these highly endangered species.

Our rhino research and monitoring on local reserves has now been built up over several years, allowing us to see key trends in their behaviour and condition over time. Data on the areas in which rhinos are frequently found, their associations with other rhinos and their reactions to humans are all valuable for rhino conservation and anti-poaching. Recently, we have had a particularly exciting and heartwarming development on one of our reserves – a new young white rhino was introduced into the reserve! We have been fortunate to spend a lot of time with her, observing her behaviour, condition and interaction with another white rhino. This has allowed us to collect valuable data on the introduction of a new young rhino into a reserve. Fortunately, she appears to be integrating very well and making herself at home! We look forward to monitoring her progress and her growth.

Another incredibly important part of conservation is education. While there is widespread global concern about the poaching of elephants for their ivory, there is much less awareness about the poaching of rhinos, and yet rates of rhino poaching in South Africa alone are so high that roughly 3 rhinos are killed every day.
Hence, the education and awareness that our volunteers gain about the rhino poaching crisis is incredibly important, as is the awareness they spread when they return to their home countries and speak about their experiences.

We were fortunate to have a recent presentation on rhino dehorning by a highly respected and experienced local guide. This policy is not uncontroversial, as it is both expensive and not without risks, both in terms of stressing the animal during the procedure and concerns that denhorning may affect rhino behaviour. However, dehorning is currently used as a desperate measure to buy antipoachers crucial breathing space in the battle against poaching. Research has shown that in reserves where the rhinos are dehorned, incidence of poaching is dramatically reduced. Furthermore, there is little evidence that dehorning affects rhino behaviour. All rhinos in the reserves we work in are dehorned, and this is being gradually rolled out to almost all rhinos in the Greater Kruger area. While it is can be sad to see these majestic creatures without their horns, we are reminded with every sighting of how fortunate we are to see this species at all and constantly motivated to continue our conservation work to ensure their survival.
My eyes are burning as I sit on the edge of my bed at 3 in the morning, contemplating my life choices and wondering if it’s all worth it. I go to take a shower but to my horror and disgust I find that there is no hot water. I get out of the shower shivering, slide on the wet floor and bump my head. Finally done, I try to make some coffee only to find the milk is sour.

As I walk around the game viewer assigned to me, I notice a flat tire. I get to work changing the wheel. I’m dirty, sweaty and exhausted as I finish the job. I also top up the oil, check the lights and indicators and all is good, at least with the vehicle. It feels like a small victory after a hard morning.
Eventually the guests all board the vehicle and I take off to show them nature in its true form, not as it’s usually portrayed on animal planet. You see, on nature programs the illusion of nature in perfect harmony and abundance is portrayed, while in reality the animals live in fragmented and patchy habitat and are in constant conflict with humans. Also you have to look really hard to find animals, they don’t just walk around to please your guests.

After a long drive spotting only trees, rocks and the occasional impala herd, I felt really bad for my guests, as I was sure they were expecting what they had seen on television programs. Then, as everybody got off the vehicle one guy turned to me and said: “Thank you for the drive, I really enjoyed it”. Right then I knew, it really is all worth it...even a “bad” day in nature is better than a good day in town.
THE WARTHOG POST

African Impact Conservation Projects – Greater Kruger Area, South Africa

NOVEMBER 2019

This monthly newsletter is made by volunteers of African Impact located in Greater Kruger.

BEHIND THE FRAME

TARUKI ROSSI
PHOTOGRAPHY VOLUNTEER FROM ITALY

"I took this picture because it symbolizes my curiosity towards the world and my surroundings. It also demonstrates how a hyena can very much have human expressions." 1/100, f5, iso3200

JUST/uploaded TO OUR STOCK SITE

Check out our newest submissions for this month on:

africanimpactphotography.com