



Legodimo Nature Reserve- Sunset

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Dumela!

Firstly I would like to introduce myself.

I live on Legodimo Nature Reserve, which is the most beautiful place in the whole world and I am the wife of Gerrit (Project Director) who is the most amazing human-being on the planet. My name is Mieke and I am the new Projects Abroad Desk Officer for the Southern African Conservation Project in Botswana☺

I am an African, born in South Africa and raised by loving Afrikaans parents in the suburbs of Johannesburg. Conservation is my passion, Nature is my motivation and people are where I find energy. The way that I perceive the project and being a staff member is not as a job, it is a lifestyle. I love working with volunteers because in order to be a volunteer, you have had to make a decision about giving away your time and going to a faraway country to help out and make a difference, so before you even reach your destination you have started a chain of reactions which can only have a positive impact. You are alleviating your community or area from the resources of one whole person just by choosing to come to Botswana for three months.

I'm busy with a degree in Health and Social Sciences from the University of South Africa. It is an Open University, so I receive my textbooks and subject guides in the post and I only have to go into town to write exams- convenient! Now I will use my time to also fulfil the duties of a Desk Officer to the best of my ability.

I will be taking over from Kathy- who will be sadly missed! Due to complications with Botswana Immigration, Kathy could not return home and the emptiness is tangible. We wish her all the best in her new ventures and we are all certain that we will have her come home again.

Look out for new additions to the newsletter in months to come and keep sending your "volunteer stories", they are much appreciated. The newsletters are created for past, present and future volunteers so please do not hesitate to contact me with suggestions or opinions about the newsletter.

Until next month,

African Sunshine Greetings,
Mieke Prinsloo



Taking a look at the Republic of Botswana.



The Conservation Project's base camp, Legodimo Nature Reserve is situated in the Tuli Block, Botswana. Botswana is one of the most beautiful and diverse countries in the world. With a population of about 1.8 million people, it is the smallest country in Africa. Botswana also boasts one of the strongest economies on the continent.

The urban centre of Botswana is Gaborone, situated in the extreme southeast part of the country. The city has a population of nearly 250 000 people and has road and air communications to South Africa.



Left above:
Country flag

Left:
Map of Botswana
Red= Gaborone
Blue= Legodimo Nature Reserve

The official language is English, which is used in government and business affairs. Setswana is the national language and is widely spoken by the Batswana (person from Botswana) who are the most numerous people in the country, forming about 78.2% of the population.

Climate:

Summer is from December to March with high temperatures ranging between 30C to 50C and low temperatures reaching 18C. This is also the rain season. Winter starts from June and ends in August. Daytime temperatures can be expected at 23C, with night-time lows of 5C.

Currency:

The Pula is divided into 100 thebe. Notes are P100, P50, P20 and P10. Coins are P5, P2, P1 and thebe 50t, 25t, 10t and 5t. Pula means "rain" in Setswana; this shows the attitude that the Batswana have towards money, because rain means everything to an African person.



100 pula Note



Botswana is famous for vast wildernesses and for herds of elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) averaging 150 individuals.

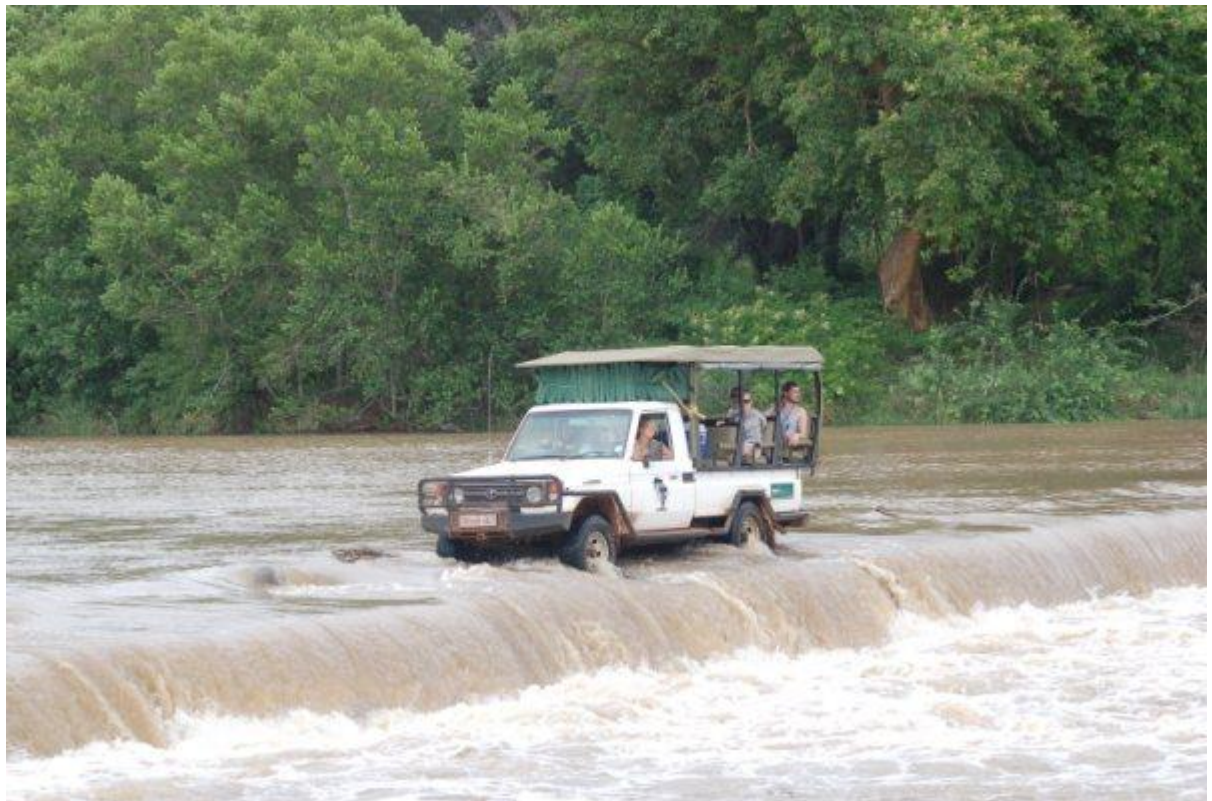
The Mighty Limpopo...

This month we have a visitor who was expected a bit earlier, but decided to arrive late and in full force this year... The Limpopo River.

The Limpopo River acts as the border between South-Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe and flows into the ocean through Mozambique. It is the second largest east-flowing river in Africa and runs for approx. 2000km. The river sustains a large expanse of wilderness and in some areas it is the main water source.

The Limpopo yields all kinds of rocks and gems, including diamonds. It is the main attraction for bird lovers on the Limpopo birding route and serves as a habitat for at least 350 different species of birds.

The Platjan Border post is where we enter and exit Botswana. When this majestic body of water decides to put in an appearance, this is what our border crossings look like:



Matt, Sam, Mieke (NL), Max (US), Jen (Can) all experiencing a breathtaking view...

If we were to decide not to make the crossing, it would add 330km to our trip. Luckily for us we have two very experienced conservationists, in the form of Gerrit and Matt, who are trusted with driving a 3-ton Cruiser through thousands of kiloliters of water moving at a fast pace.



A crossing from the Botswana side over the bridge to the South African side.

News and Update

Farewell trusted friends...

We have had to say goodbye to our goats, Give and Bart this month. They have moved on to a village nearby camp, as the risk of them becoming some predator's food became too high.

We will miss them dearly.



Give and Bart were given to us by a Dutch volunteer, Bart de Beer.

We loved them very much and will miss their sounds in the morning.

Oh my Croc!!

Whilst blissfully enjoying themselves on a tree walk earlier this month, the Legodimo conservation team came upon something that they thought was a duck. Much to their surprise it was a headless crocodile!

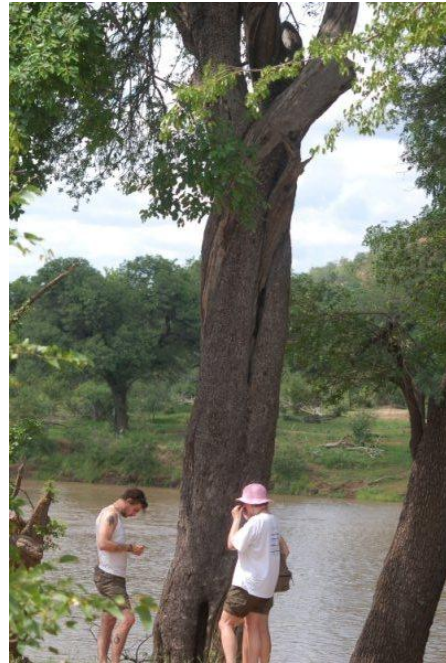


The theory is that the poor croc got its head bitten off by another, stronger male. Well, the Legodimo staff can recognise a learning opportunity...bring on the scalpels! We had a flashback of High school biology class, but this time it was much more fun...



My Big Brown Ivory.

During a bird observation at the weir, Gerrit spotted a Brown Ivory tree that was bigger than any Brown Ivory tree he had ever seen.



Common Name: Brown Ivory

Latin Name: *Berchemia discolor*

The Brown Ivory is an evergreen tree occurring in low-altitude bushveld. Its leaves have an elliptic shape, are shiny dark green above and pale green below. The wood is yellow-brown, hard, attractive and suitable for furniture. This tree is browsed by game. Humans use the fruit to make beer and the bark and leaves for medicinal purposes.

Jennifer's Birthday.

We have had the pleasure of sharing Jennifer Moustgaard's birthday on the 2nd of February (apparently its Groundhog Day in the U.S. **Happy Birthday Jennifer, May there be many more!!**)

For Jennifer's birthday the team took her out in our closest village Mhathathane.



Jennifer Moustgaard
The team celebrating Jen's b-day

The bar in Mathathane
Passersby and their donkey-cart



Jen's birthday
Attracted some
special guests...

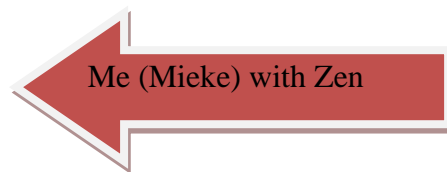


Zen's Bush Story.

Zen is a dog. More specifically, Zen is the Legodimo dog.

Zen was born on the 12th of January 2009 and has been living on Legodimo ever since. He has got so much personality and attitude that it is necessary to include him in the newsletter.

Here are some pictures of him when he was just born- each month there will be a report on Zen and his antics.



The Project has once again undergone a change. We are saying farewell to a special person, but luckily we are also saying hello to new opportunities.

Kathy Troke-Thomas has had to leave Legodimo due to visa circumstances. She will always be a part of Legodimo and she will never be erased from our memories. Thanks Kath! You rocked this place and you possess a special gift to make everyday easier and happier.

The People who make it happen:

This month we are celebrating the birthday of our most important team member. Gerrit is the Director of the project and without him, nothing would be possible. Thank you, Gerrit, for being who you are and always believing in conservation. You are an inspiration to everyone who crosses your path and you have an amazing ability to believe in people, especially when they struggle to believe in themselves. Have a wonderful birthday from all volunteers and staff alike!

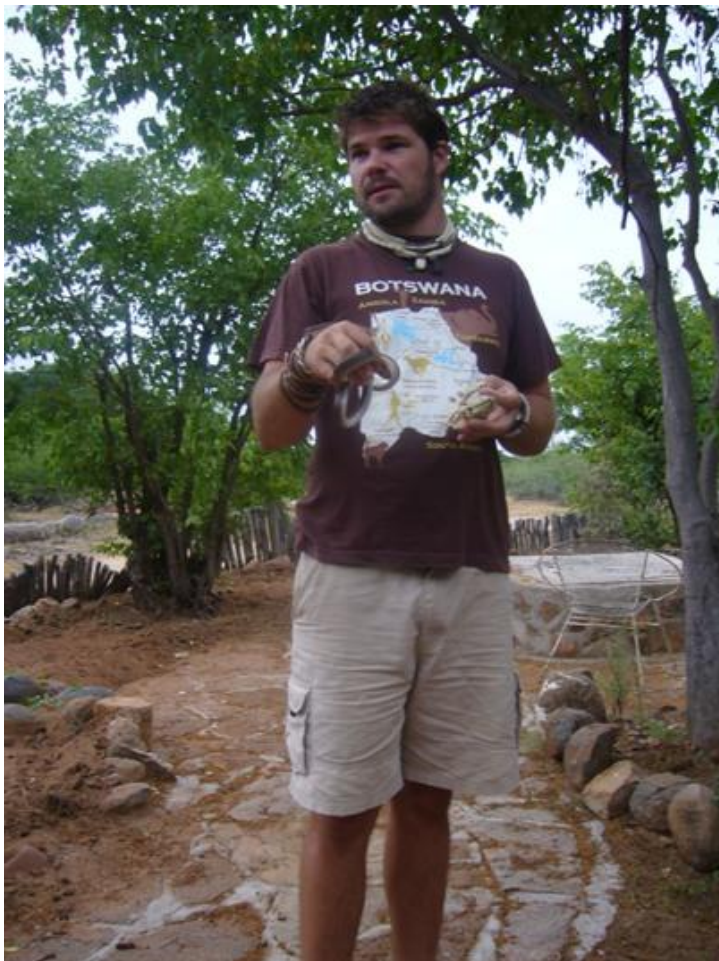
Project Director Profile:

Name: Gerrit Prinsloo

Birthday: 11 February 1980

Birthplace: Rustenburg, North-West Province, South Africa

Languages: Afrikaans, English and Setswana



Here Gerrit is doing one of his famous Snake Demos.

Gerrit has grown up with a passion for snakes. He had his first poisonous snake when he was four and he has been bitten by numerous venomous snakes, including Black Mamba and Puff adder.

Interview with Gerrit, our Project Director...

1. Why did you choose Conservation?

From a very young age, I was exposed to the intricacy and diversity of nature. I was lucky to have been born in the bush. My plan was to focus on research, but I quickly discovered that environmental education is key in conserving any aspect of nature for future generations.

2. How long have you been working with volunteers and Projects Abroad?

I have been working with volunteers for 8 years on various conservation projects and reserves. In total I have worked with Projects Abroad for 5 years of which 3 years were on Legodimo.

3. What is your long-term vision for this project?

The area that the project is situated in is part of a pristine wilderness. I would like to expand this project over the whole Tuli Block to eventually reach a point where the whole area is proclaimed especially for conservation. The only way we can do that is through volunteers and consistent conservation.

4. What is your favourite animal?

It has to be Elephants. They are so majestic, intelligent, mesmerising and misunderstood.

They are also a flagship species which has caused a lot of uproar and debates worldwide. Elephants have singlehandedly managed to attract most of the world's attention. They need to be allowed to migrate freely, for the benefit of the whole continent.

5. What is your favourite Conservation Project and why?

I enjoy the carnivore project the most. It is exhilarating to try and find especially the big cats and tricking them to pose for a photo.

6. Why should volunteers choose Botswana conservation?

Botswana is one of the last true wilderness areas and the last country to really implement structures for the benefit of conservation. The platform and resources for aspiring conservationists is huge and the possibilities are endless.

7. What are your hobbies?

I collect skulls, coins, cow bells, Zippos, drums, books, paintings and a variety of other things. I enjoy working in my garden and I put a lot of effort and time into it- my plants are a passion. Growing up I had almost everything relating to nature as a hobby at some point with the exceptions of soil, grasses and rocks.

8. And finally, what words of wisdom would you give to prospective volunteers?

Bite off more than you can chew and then chew it: make a change.



Gerrit grew up in the bush and has an intense passion for Nature.

Gerrit is a keen musician and plays the guitar and has extreme talent with a Djembe drum. Gerrit has a collection of 15 Djembe drums.



Past volunteers who were with us during the period of January 2009 to January 2010 might notice a slight change in the appearance of our trusted Conservation Manager, Matt.



BEFORE...



AFTER...

Please email me at southafrica-cons@projects-abroad.org or Matt at mattmathee@projects-abroad.org with any comments or opinions!

There will be a full interview with Matt, about this sudden change, in next month's newsletter. Watch this space.

VOLUNTEERS' CORNER

Mieke Zwagger from the Netherlands wrote the following story close to the end of her stay:

From the day you arrive in Africa, it's just one big adventure. You stay in the middle of the bush, you don't use electricity and when you take a shower you can see the beautiful stars. And, most important of all, you are surrounded by nature. You wake up with all the animal sounds, and when you go to bed, birds, baboons and hippos will make you fall asleep.

Besides the amazing nature, are the people. Everyone is so friendly, from the staff members, to the volunteers to the local people. You feel welcome immediately. Of course it took me a few days to adapt to the heat, a totally different way of living and the African time schedule. It's best if you just don't think a lot, but just do it. Just jump into it and see what happens.

I can say that being in Africa and staying with Projects Abroad was one of the greatest experiences of my life. It's definitely the best way to experience the real African feeling. To see all the animals like elephants and leopards from just a few meters distance is so amazing, I can't even describe it. I have learned a lot. Not just about nature, about animals and plants. But also about what it's like to live here, without all the facilities at home. And it actually makes you feel good, not using electricity, saving water. After a week you get so used to it, and it would be weird to take a hot shower. I started to appreciate things at home I normally wouldn't think about, things that are 'just there'. And I have learned a lot about myself. I became more independent and I am sure I have changed in other ways.

It is difficult to describe this place and my experience in just a few words; you have to experience it yourself! I am sure you will enjoy it and have great time, and you really help nature at the same time!

Thanks everyone for giving me an incredible time!
Love Mieke

Mieke Zwagger, learning about snakes in a Snake Demo



Mieke, busy with GPS mapping...

Mieke on a research drive, receiving a friendly visit from an old bull elephant...



And Finally...

I have enjoyed sharing news from Legodimo with you for the first time. Each month the newsletter will improve, you can look forward to more project articles, more volunteer stories and staff columns.

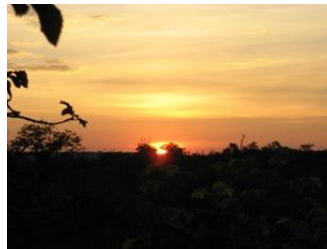
Please keep in touch; we want to know what you are up to and how Legodimo has influenced your life.

Thanks to all who make this project possible and keep on fighting the conservation war.
Take care,

Mieke Prinsloo



A beautiful sunrise to remind volunteers of the beauty of the African bush...



Brave volunteers walking across the flooded bridge.....



Left: a Giraffe walking peacefully next to the road in South-Africa....
Below: an Elephant cow enjoying the waterhole...

