

ProjectsAbroad™

The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad Conservation Southern Africa

Issue No. 1 October 2011



Karen Guthrie (CAN, 33, 2 months) and Mandy Rehork (GER, 34, 2 months) looking after the seedlings for the new nursery. Read more about Mandy's experience in the bush on page 3.

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Editor's Note

Dumela!

Welcome to the first newsletter since the move to the Kwa Tuli Reserve! On September 23rd, Projects Abroad moved from Legodimo – where we were working for four and a half years. I know many volunteers had amazing experiences there, and we wish Gerrit (G) and Mieke all the very best in their future endeavours.

The seasons are slowly changing, and so we enter a new season in the Projects Abroad Conservation year. The last few cold nights have left, and the first few really hot days are beginning. The bush is dry and brittle from the winter, not having had any rain in several months, except for the massive storm you can read about on page 10.



As I write this, I can see warthogs on their front knees, grazing along the riverbank, and a curious impala female ventures a little closer to me. Tree squirrels are chasing each other up and down the tall leadwood tree in front of the office, and young baboons chase each other through the fig trees, while their more subdued elders look on.

The new Projects Abroad Kwa Tuli Conservation Project is situated in the Central Tuli Block, with Koro Camp built along the banks of the Limpopo River. You can read more in the feature on page 6, which introduces a little more history of the Kwa Tuli Reserve as well as the general Tuli Block.

Koro Camp is named after the hornbill

Volunteers Mandy Rehork from Germany and Laurent Taevernier from Belgium share their experiences of their stay here on page 3.

You can read about the various species population census on offer (written by Conservation Manager Kieran Harkin) on page 8 and then meet our staff on page 13. Find out how we spend our evenings on page 7, and finally, please enjoy the staff and volunteer photos on page 11.

If you have any suggestions or comments, feel free to contact me. Until next time!

Kaliboga (thank you)

Gisela Madden
Desk Officer and Camp Manager
Projects Abroad Kwa Tuli Conservation Project

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Laurent and Mandy share their stories on page 3

Die Erste Woche in Koro Camp

Mandy Rehork

Am Freitag, dem 23. September startete das Conservation Project von Projects Abroad an neuer location in Botswana. Der Name des Camp ist „Koro-Camp“, Koro ist Tswana und

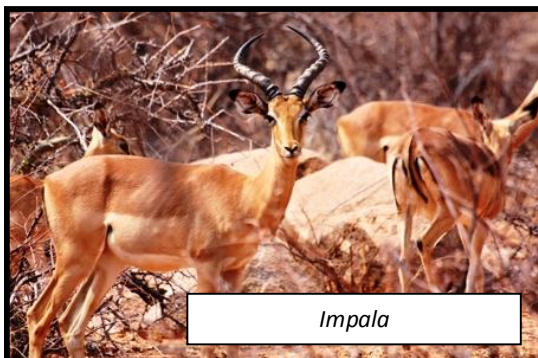
bedeutet Hornbill, ein lustig aussehen der Vogel, der hier überall anzutreffen ist, auch bekannt

als Zazou aus „Der König der

Löwen“. Wunderschön gelegen am Fluss Limpopo kommen wir am Vormittag hier an. Unterwegs wieder viele Impalas und kurz vor dem Camp die ersten Krokodile erspäht. Zum Glück liegen sie ganz ruhig am Sandstrand am anderen Ufer des Flusses, aber auch aus dieser Entfernung sehen sie riesig aus, so fast drei Meter werden sie sein. Unter großen Bäumen, die in der Tageshitze wunderbar Schatten geben, stehen unsere Zelte, schön geräumig, mit jeweils zwei Betten darin und sogar Teppich, richtig heimelig. Das Auspacken wird auch später verschoben, erst mal alles erkunden, es gefällt mir gut hier, ein Bushcamp wie aus Afrika-Filmen bekannt.



Rex spricht vom Giraffen Schädel



Impala

Das Bad mit Toilette und Dusche gleich hinter dem Zelt, so ist der Weg nachts nicht so weit, die vielen Geräusche können schon beängstigend sein. Eine Küche im extra Haus, daneben die Waschküche und die commonarea mit Grillplatz und schönem Ausblick auf den Fluss, der nur ein paar

Schritte entfernt ist. Unsere Köchin Jane zaubert unser erstes Mittagessen, Tunfischsalat und Gem Squash, eine Art Kürbis, der gekocht und mit Butter und Zucker gegessen wird, etwas ungewöhnlich aber lecker.

Am Nachmittag sollten wir uns im Spurenlesen versuchen, welche von Löwen sollten gefunden werden. Vorher gab's noch ein briefing von Rex, einem localguide, damit wir auch die Spuren von Löwen oder anderen Raubtieren (z.B. Leopard, Gepard, Hyäne) im Sand erkennen. Einige

Nächte zuvor wurden hier Löwen gehört und wir sollten jetzt einen Beweis für deren Existenz finden. Gegen drei Uhr nachmittags ging's los, eigentlich noch recht heiß um diese



Hyäne Spur und Kot

Zeit, aber mit ordentlich Sonnencreme und Hut wird's schon gehen. Sehr interessant, dieser Spaziergang, Rund ums Camp Köttel und Spuren von Impala, Kudu, Stachelschwein, Zebra und Elefant, ein Beweis wir sind mitten im Busch. Nach einer Weile dann die ersten Hyänenspuren gesichtet aber leider keine von Löwen, vielleicht waren sie nur auf der Durchreise, irgendwann habe ich ja vielleicht nochmal Glück, einen Löwen aus sicherer Entfernung in seiner natürlichen Umgebung sehen, wäre schon toll.



Karen und Kieran fleissig dabei

Nach der Rückkehr eine schöne Dusche, der kleine Pool ist leider noch nicht gefüllt, Warmwasser gibt's leider noch nicht, ist aber eigentlich auch nicht nötig, denn eine kalte Dusche ist nach einer Wanderung unter Afrikas Sonne so erfrischend. Am Abend, nach dem Essen, wird oft noch Karten gespielt. Erstaunlich wie viele unterschiedliche Spielregeln es für Rommee gibt, hier sind Volontäre aus Dänemark, Belgien und Canada und dann noch Gisela, unsere Camp Managerin, aus Südafrika, von jedem Land ein bisschen und das Spiel wird quasi neu erfunden.

Am Samstagvormittag fuhren wir zu einem alten Rinderpferch, das Land hier war früher eine Rinderfarm, und haben alten Müll eingesammelt. Jede Fahrt zu einem „Einsatzort“ ist immer eine kleine Safari, diesmal u.a. eine Riesentrappe und einen Schakal. Nachmittags hatten wir unsere erste Observation in Mamatumi Hide (eine Art

Hochsitz), wir sollten Ausschau nach Tieren halten und alles schön aufschreiben, leider haben wir nicht viel zu sehen bekommen, hat fast den Anschein, die Tiere nehmen reis aus, wenn sie Menschen im hide sehen bzw. wittern. Aber alles in allem ein sehr abwechslungsreicher Tag.

Sonntags ist immer day off, das heißt keine „Arbeit“, nur Freizeit, relaxen, lesen, einfach mal nichts tun. Kieran, unser irischer Conservation Manager, und Karen aus Canada, sind die ersten, die sich im Aussäen von Gemüse versuchen. Zum Jahresende soll geerntet werden, ich bin gespannt, ob die Tomaten dann schon reif sind. Merkwürdig, an Weihnachten Gemüse ernten, nun ja hier am anderen Ende der Welt, ticken die Uhren halt anders.

Im Laufe der nächsten Woche steht Trakking (Spurensuche), Soil Erusion (Errosionsschutz) und Observation auf dem Plan, es bleibt also interessant, mal sehen, was noch so alles passiert ...

*To see this article
in English, please
visit our blog!*

<http://www.mytripblog.org>

**Mandy Rehork, 34
Jahre, Deutschland, 2 Monate im**



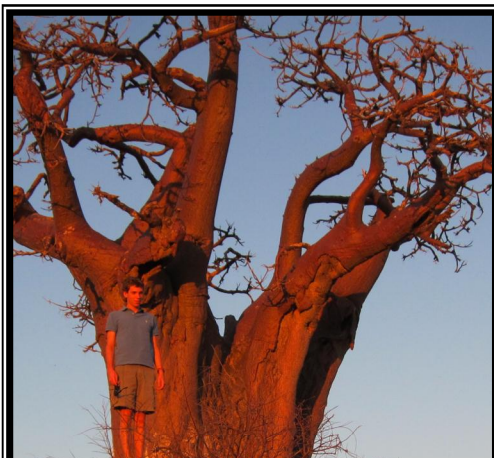
**conservation project
Photos by Mandy Rehork**

The Kill

Laurent Taevernier

Vandaag zijn we op zoek naar sporen van roofdieren, op het eind van onze tocht zagen we iets heel speciaals dat ik nog nooit gezien had; het was een sleepspoor van een jachtluipaard dat zijn prooi 500 meter ver tot in een boom heeft geslepen om het hoog en droog te kunnen opsmullen zonder dat andere dieren er ook een stuk van zouden willen. We zijn begonnen met het spoor te volgen naar de plaats delict waar de prooi was gedood door het jachtluipaard de prooi bleek een kuddu te zijn. Een jachtluipaard kan 2 maal zijn gewicht slepen en dragen tot op een bepaalde hoogte om het op te eten.

We zijn het spoor beginnen volgen om uiteindelijk de restanten te kunnen zien en dan na 500 meter zagen we de innerlijke organen van het beest dat hing in de boom de rest van de prooi is waarschijnlijk mee genomen door hyena's om verder op te eten. Jachtluipaarden eten enkel het vlees dus niet het gal en de organen en beenderen dat is werk voor de andere dieren.



Laurent in front of a baobab tree (Jeff Dubus)

Today we were on the hunt for evidence of predators, and by the end of the trek we found something special I'd never seen before: the drag-marks of a leopard that dragged its kill over 500m into a tree, to keep it safe from other ground-dwelling predators. We started tracking the kill at the beginning where the buck was attacked – it seems to have been a kudu. A leopard can drag and carry an animal up to twice its body-size into a tree.

After we started tracking the kill, we eventually found the buck's internal organs dangling in a tree, the only thing left, as leopard generally don't eat the internal organs. They also don't eat the bones or fur of prey, but as we didn't

find this, it's possible a hyena was able to pull it down from the tree and eat it elsewhere.

(Translated by Gisela Madden)

Laurent Taevernier, 19, Belgium, 3 weeks

Kwa Tuli and the Tuli Block History

The Tuli Block is an area in south-eastern Botswana, bordering Zimbabwe in the east and South Africa in the south. It's essentially been a farming region, having been utilized for agriculture since around 900AD. The land has undergone centuries of cultivation, from crops to cattle.

predators a threat to cattle, and Then 1800s, European decimated was the called Hunter Selous as Hartley, to have killed 1200 the area.



Elephant and were seen as the crops and were hunted. during the professional hunters the area. This time of the so-Great White Frederick well as Henry who claimed personally elephant in

In 1920, the British South Africa Company divided the Tuli Block into private farms, many continuing with cattle farming. However, the harsh land and successive dry years had many remove their cattle, and the land lay fallow. In 1964 like-minded landowners, who had a passion for the bush and its wildlife, founded an organization to conserve the area. They removed fences and to create a more open area for animals to move around freely in, with the ultimate objective of creating a Transfrontier Park, extending into Zimbabwe and South Africa.

The proposed Limpopo/Shashe Transfrontier Conservation Area will cover nearly 5000 km² across South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana. Projects Abroad Kwa Tuli Reserve will be situated on the western fringe of this massive area.

Kwa Tuli was bought 5 years ago. The land hasn't been used for hunting in many years, resulting in good game sightings. In areas where hunting is allowed, game associate vehicles and people with danger, and so run away. At Kwa Tuli, animals don't shy away from vehicles, making it easier to conduct research. The actual property is around 5000 ha, but traversing



rights on neighbouring farms bring the area to around 35000 ha on which we're able to work.

The scenery is predominantly bushveld (or mixed woodland, with a mix of bushes, trees and grasses) with little *koppies* (small rocky hills), and beautiful riverine forest along on the Limpopo River.

We've seen or collected evidence of predators such as wild dog, lion, leopard, brown and spotted hyena. The area supports many of the bigger antelope, and is home to the Tuli elephants, too. The bird diversity is also amazing.

Because the farm is relatively new, and covers a large area, there are still fences to be removed, *kraals* (small villages) cleaned up and dams to be built for water for elephants in the dry winter. And of course all the data collection we need to conduct in order to prove that this area is worthy of protection, with the eventual goal of establishing and joining the Transfrontier Conservation Area.



Information taken from *Tuli: Land of Giants* by Roger and Pat de la Harpe (2004, Sunbird Publishing).

Photos by Jeff Dubus

Bush TV

Every night, after we've had a hearty meal and before we drift off to our tents to sleep, volunteers and staff gather around the bush TV. We sit down comfortably, perhaps sipping a mug of *rooibos* tea, and loose ourselves for a while. Occasionally, someone will start a conversation, but invariably we revert back to a comfortable silence, our attention focused ahead, and our thoughts to ourselves.

Bush TV is just a term for the camp-fire. Watching the flames dance and lick at the wood, changing colour from red, yellow and orange to a hint of black or even green, is mesmerizing. We reflect on the day, and on what tomorrow may bring. Every now and then, someone adds a log to the fire, making the embers flare up into the sky, and then things settle down again, and we sit, and watch.



Project Focus

by Conservation Manager
Kieran Harkin

Projects at Kwa Tuli Reserve

As the Conservation Manager for Projects Abroad at Kwa Tuli reserve I am immensely proud to not only be a custodian of this land but to be given the opportunity to work with many volunteers from around the world and lead them in many exciting conservation projects. The Tuli Block area in Botswana is home to a wide range of species and it holds some of the IUCN red listed highly endangered species. With a huge passion for conservation and nature, the opportunity to work in this unique environment is one to be shared with each and every volunteer. With the staff we have, the beautiful reserve and Projects Abroad volunteers I have no doubt we can make a difference in this area and become a leading authority in conservation within the central Tuli Block, and achieve our overall goal of getting this area protected by law.



Kieran Harkin
Projects Abroad Kwa Tuli Conservation
Project
Conservation Manager

Species Population Census

In order to begin any conservation or management plans of an eco-system it is essential to get a picture of the general environmental characteristics of the site, and find out what species are present, and in what numbers. Hence at Kwa Tuli we have began preliminary surveys of the area focusing on assessing biodiversity in key areas through population censuses of key species.

Mammal Project

For our mammal project we decided to conduct a census of our predators. As with any species they are important to conserve for many reasons - environmental, economic, aesthetic and

moral to name but a few. They also act as *indicator species*, indicating to us how healthy our eco-system is here at Kwa Tuli. As the number of predators can only be determined by the number of prey below them in the trophic levels, then a population census shows not only a census of each predator species, but provides an indication of how healthy the antelope and ground bird species are, and in turn how healthy the vegetation and invertebrates are.

The species chosen were the Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Lion (*Panthera leo*), Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), Spotted Hyaena (*Crouta crouta*), Brown Hyaena (*Parahyaena brunnea*), African Civet (*Civettictis civetta*) Black Backed Jackal

(*Canis mesomelas*). With additions made as we collect data, last week we recorded the African Wild Cat (*Felis silvestris lybica*), and Caracal (*Caracal caracal*) through the use of camera traps.

Our mammal data collection uses data in spoor (tracks), scat (poo), sightings and camera traps to determine numbers, age structures, territories and population growths and declines. The results so far are showing us that we have a very healthy population of Leopards on the reserve and one big male named Nkwe, who we are continuously tracking with the help of our volunteers.

With very positive results to date with all species we are very excited about this project as it is delivering data to be used in our goal to protect the reserve by national law, and it proved to be very exciting to know that we have all this species within the reserve and to be lucky enough to work with them.

Last week our volunteers came within 50 meters of Cheetah, Brown Hyaena and Black Backed Jackal and Crocodile.

Our predator project also includes the extremely endangered Wild Dog (*Lycan pictus*) which we are part of a joint program that has GPS collared two dogs. The matriarch (alpha female) dog named Cairo has last been located with 5km of Kwa Tuli. We are all hoping she moves her pack to our reserve next where we can be involved closer in the conservation of this highly endangered and beautiful creature.

Our final predator survey is of the Nile Crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*). As our Koro Camp is situated at the banks of the Limpopo river it is an opportunity to conduct surveys within this beautiful habitat. Again the crocodile, like all the predator species, acts as an indicator to

how healthy the eco-system is, in terms of the trophic levels below it.

Bird Survey

With the sheer number of birds that visit and live in our reserve it is essential that we monitor their numbers and enhance their habitat in order to protect them from decline. We are extremely lucky to have pairs of the highly endangered Pel's Fishing Owl (*Scotopelia peli*) and the Southern Ground Hornbill (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*), which we monitor as closely as we can without disturbing them.

Our first bird experiment is being conducted along the Limpopo river at various locations where our volunteers are monitoring species numbers and building up a picture of the densities of each species we have in this pristine habitat. The initial experiment is due to finish in the coming weeks and the results will be displayed in forthcoming newsletters.

Plant Survey

As Kwa Tuli Reserve has a large number of Baobab Trees (*Adansonia digitata*) it has presented us the opportunity to conduct an unprecedented survey of this magnificent tree. Although some of these trees are over 1000 years old, there has never been a survey conducted in this area. We have begun a survey to answer questions relating to their spatial distribution, seed dispersal, overall health and to answer the simple question of how many we have on the reserve. Nobody knows! With numerous measurements, photographs and GPS coordinates taken at each site we are immensely proud of this project and the fact that it will mean Projects Abroad at Kwa Tuli will become a leading authority in data collection and storing of this species within the Tuli Block area.

The First Rains

The past few days, we've heard a distant rumble of thunder. Yesterday, volunteers went out in the afternoon; half to fix a hide, to make it more suitable for an overnight observation, and half went looking for predator evidence around the hide. I was in camp.

It had been a hot day, and humid. Earlier, some of the volunteers had been cooling off in the newly filled

pool. Come afternoon, a slow darkening of the southern sky indicated a storm brewing, as it had been the past days. Was it going to hit us this time? Suddenly, a rush of wind hurtled ahead of the oncoming rains, picking up papers, a considerable amount of

dust, and shaking branches from trees. Tents went flapping, chairs fell over, and I rushed about preparing the camp for the inevitable storm. The grumble of thunder had now turned to

almighty claps right above, and the lightning streaked down all around us. And then the rain gushed down.

Within minutes, the dry, dusty soil was a broth of mud and water, creating little rivulets heading downhill. I was soaked in seconds, relishing the first rains of the season, while frantically trying to close tents to the storm.

The rain only abated after about an hour; a good downpour, certainly

enough to soak the top-soil. The little rivulets gathered and flowed into the now brown and muddy Limpopo, as well as the deep donga behind the camp, which filled up as the streams flowed to it. Finally, the storm moved further north, drenching the thirsty ground and filling water holes for the animals to drink from. The sun peaked out

of the clouds just before it set, and we were left with a brief glimpse of the chaos and destruction around the camp. Tomorrow, we clean up...

(The first thunder storm came in the afternoon of Monday October 3rd.)

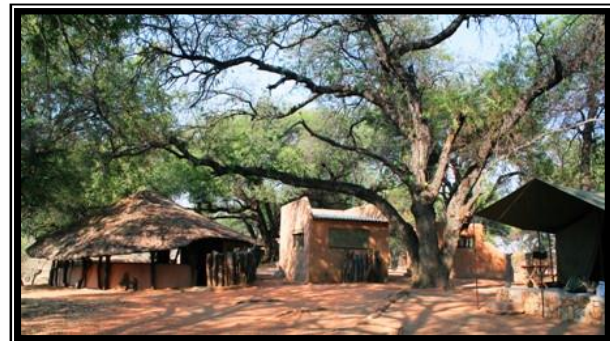
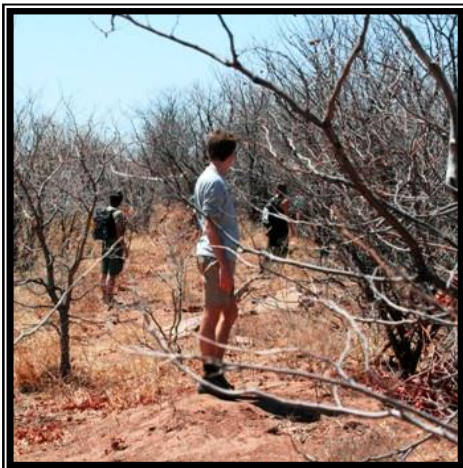
By Gisela Madden; Photo by Jeff Dubus



Photo Page



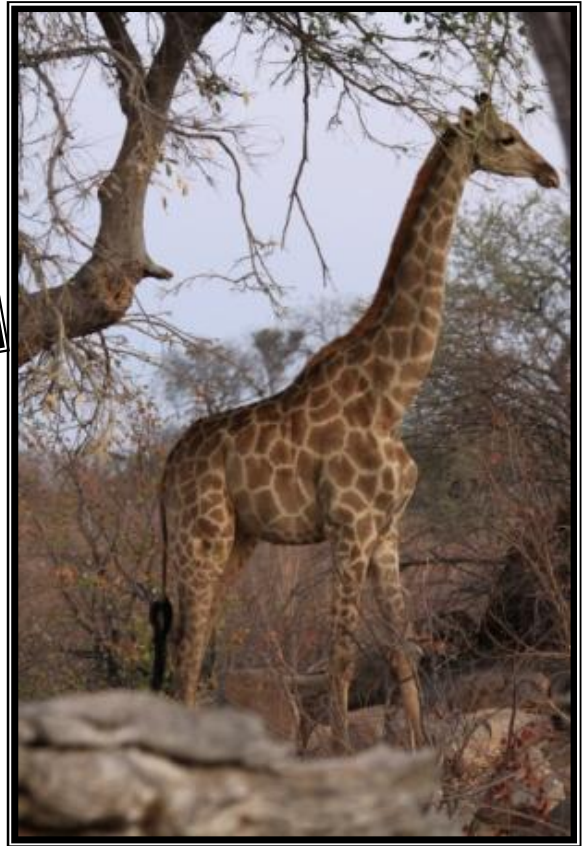
Conservation Manager Kieran Harkin, Jeff Dubus, fieldguide Sakaeo Manyatsa, Peter Hansen, Delphine Laforse, Laurent Taevernier, Karen Guthrie, Amalie Jelstrup, staff Jane Manyatsa, Mandy Rehork, staff Pinki Mashokga, Udo Fuehrer



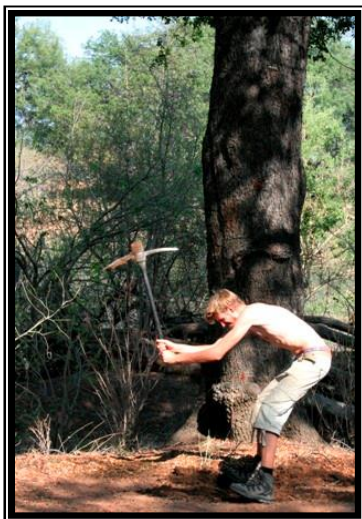
Above left: volunteers keep each other in sight while looking for snares.

Above right: A look at Koro camp

Right: a praying mantis



Top left: Sakaeo, Mandy Rehork and Peter Hansen sleep at Mammatumi Hide.
Top right: the first giraffe on Kwa Tuli in 5 years (*Jeff Dubus*)
Above: volunteers begin clearing a space in camp for the nursery
Below left: Peter Hansen puts his back into the work needed for the nursery.
Below right: A kudu female (*Jeff Dubus*)



Meet Our Staff

Dr Helena Fitchat
Conservation Director

Helena is co-owner of Kwa Tuli Reserve, which was bought 5 years ago, and she has been living on the property for the past 2 years. Her overall goal is to have this area proclaimed worthy of saving, building towards a cross-borders transfrontier park, such as the Kruger National Park (South Africa and Mozambique) or the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (Namibia, Botswana and South Africa). These massive parks are vital for re-establishing traditional migratory routes of big game such as elephant, whose habitat has been destroyed by human agriculture and encroachment. In order to achieve this goal, data is needed from Kwa Tuli and neighbouring reserves: this is where volunteers come in, to help collect data, make



this reserve a valuable natural resource, and spread this practice to neighbouring farms. Helena has spent over 30 years in the bush.

She is an expert tracker, has crossed the Kalahari Desert on her own and lived with the Bushmen for a year. She is also a pilot and a biologist specialising in animal behaviour (for which she obtained one of her two PhDs). For 10 years she was the Operations Director of The Centre for Rehabilitation Of Wildlife (CROW) in Durban, South Africa, during which time an estimated 40,000 animals

were admitted.

Her knowledge and drive for conservation will inspire volunteers, who will learn a lot from her. We welcome her to the Projects Abroad team.

Kieran Harkin
Conservation Manager

Originally from Derry in the North of Ireland, Kieran has a BSc Honours in Environmental Management and is currently working on his MSc Environmental Assessment & Management, specializing in ecology. As conservation manager, Kieran oversees the daily projects, ensuring volunteers know what to do, as well as why they're doing it. Meticulously researching and planning each activity (there are 2 a day, 6 days a week) ensures the research and work volunteers do contributes to the ultimate goal of having this area protected. His passion for the work he does, and his knowledge, help direct volunteers into productive and relevant conservation work. He worked for a year in South East Asia, tackling animal trafficking. He also taught science in Thailand for 3 years. Besides travelling, Kieran's interests lie in photography, art and music. He also plays 3 instruments.



Gisela Madden
Desk Officer & Camp Manager

Gisela's first experience with the Botswanan bush came when she was just 6 months old, and she's loved it ever since. Most recently she worked in Cape Town as the assistant director of Projects Abroad South Africa. She studied Social Anthropology at the

University of Cape Town, and taught English in South Korea for a year and a half, before travelling for half a year. Her hobbies include Geocaching, star-gazing and bird watching, and in addition to English, she speaks German and Afrikaans.

Her role is to communicate with volunteers before their arrival, ensuring they're as

prepared as can be for their stay in the bush, which is often quite a culture clash! She also oversees the camp.

She loves the bush, and enjoys teaching volunteers about the local birds.

Sakaeo Manyatsa - Field Guide

Sakaeo is our local field guide brought up in the area with lifelong bush experience. He's the younger brother of Jane, and grew up in Mathathane. He studied in Francistown. He enjoys soccer and is always keen for a game with the volunteers. He's always loved the bush, and is always keen to learn more. The best thing about volunteers is that he gets to learn about their countries from them.



Jane Manyatsa

Jane was born and raised in Mathatane, and has 3 children (2 girls and a boy, her girls were born in 1992 and 2008, her son in 1996). They live in Mathathane. Jane is very happy at the camp and is keen for the future of the project. What she loves about the volunteers is to learn about their world and she loves their enthusiasm for learning about the bush. Jane cooks all the meals during the week (volunteers and staff take turns on weekends), and makes sure everyone has enough food to keep up energy during the work hours. She makes amazing lasagna!



Pinki Moshokgo

Pinki is also from Mathathane, and makes sure the camp is in tip-top shape. She has 4 children (first daughter was born in 1982, her first son in 1984, her youngest daughter and son in 1999). They also live in Mathatane. Pinki enjoys the company of the volunteers and the beautiful camp setting.

