

NEWSLETTER

July - October 2016

“BE PART OF THE
JOURNEY,
BE PART OF THE
SOLUTION”

photo: Skyhawk Photography

MOPANE BUSH LODGE UPDATES

Dear Reader,

We would like to take this opportunity to inform everyone on the exciting changes happening at Mopane Bush Lodge.

Mopane Bush Lodge, along with Shared Universe Foundation and Shared Universe Ventures, are proud to have accomplished an important milestone on a long road to conservation that will ultimately help restore this part of Africa to its former magnificence.

It has been a two year-long project to bring a family of elephants in our care. It literally has been a labour of love. We have put in 34 kilometres of renewed Big 5 fencing with the latest technology as well as an anti-poaching unit for protective measures. There have been various waterhole upgrades, a new dam in the front of the lodge and larger one some kilometres away for future growth and improvements.

On 26th September the family of seven elephants were released on Mapesu Private Game Reserve where Mopane Bush Lodge is situated. The elephants have not roamed on Mapesu for over 120 years. They will now complement the

already occurring members of the Big 5, including the Leopard.

Due to the release, we have decided to put on hold the Nature Walk activity until we are comfortable with the Elephants behaviour towards people on foot. Instead we are replacing it with a Sunset Drive or Morning Drive in the Mapesu Private Game Reserve. We will certainly keep you updated as to when we will resume the Nature Walks.

Thank you for your support and we look forward to hosting you soon.

If you have any inquiries, please contact us at the following:
gm2@mopanebushlodge.co.za

Michelle | Mopane Bush Lodge

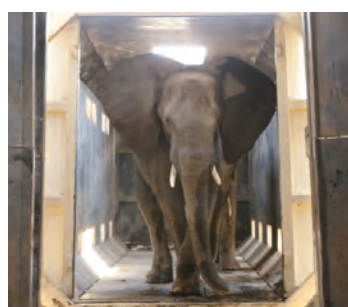


photo: Skyhawk Photography

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MAPESU ANIMAL COUNT GROWS IN NUMBERS

The recent game count on Mapesu Private Game Reserve in September showed that we are heading in the right direction. Although aerial counts are effected by a large number of variables that mean they can never be completely accurate they serve as a valuable guide upon which to base management decision. By combining the data collected through the aerial count together with ongoing known-group counts, drive counts as well as camera trapping we can safely say that the following species occur in these numbers.

Zebra - In 2014 18 zebra were counted. In 2015 we introduced additional zebras onto the property. The 2016 count showed a minimum of 26 zebras on the reserve.

Waterbuck - In 2014 there were 12 waterbuck on the reserve. After introductions of additional numbers, we now estimate the total number of waterbuck on the reserve to be at least 50.

Blue Wildebeest - in 2014 there were 22 BWB on the reserve. The population has grown gradually to at least 28 in 2016.

Gemsbok have increased in number from 53 to 61 over the last 2 years.

196 impala were counted in 2014, 2 years later the population has more than doubled to at least 447 individuals.

In 2014 there were 15 eland on Mapesu, following a successful introduction in 2015 we now have at least 36 eland on the reserve.

The reserves kudu population is doing well growing from 154 individuals in 2014 to 184 in 2016. In 2015 we did capture and sell a few of the surplus kudu.

The reserves giraffe population has remained stable, dropping slightly from 13 to 12 individuals. Despite this a handful of cows appear to be pregnant and will soon drop their young. In 2017 we hope to increase the amount of giraffe on the reserve with additional purchases.

Additional species observed during the aerial count were duikers (45), steenbok (55), bushbuck (12) as well as plenty of warthogs. The two teams also saw African wild cat as well as a civet from the air. Through the various other counting systems we use we can also ascertain that the carnivores on the reserve are flourishing with observations of leopards with cubs in two distinct regions as well as a very active hyena den on the property.

It also brings me great joy to have introduced a herd of 7 elephants onto the reserve. As a keystone species these large pachyderms will help mold and shape the bush to the benefit of the other species on the reserve.



THE IN-DEPTH DETAILS OF AN ELEPHANT TRANSLOCATION PROJECT

It's not every day one gets to be involved in a translocation project... Okay, maybe for trans-locating people or property, but elephants?

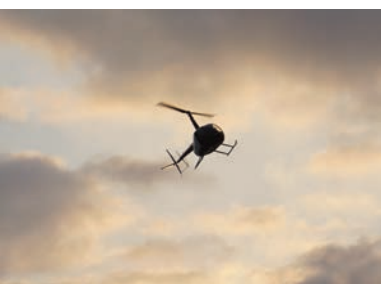
The air was cold when our group left at four in the morning which would later be our saving grace but I'll explain why later. We needed to be at the designated base camp by five a.m., a preselected location at the Maremani Nature Reserve. The location was strategically picked because it was close to where the elephants were last observed and the terrain had plenty of open space for everyone and everything.

Upon arrival was the sound of the helicopter in the distance and a sight of massive machinery; all sorts of trucks both large transport and flat beds trailers, one also included a crane, a backhoe loader, a vet vehicle and all the other vehicles that transported the various team members. There were more people than I expected from government officials observing, the hired coordinator of the trans-location company (Conservation Solution) and his large troop, photographers and camera people, the people associated with both reserves (ours and the

donators), to wives and kids of all of the above. In all more than 40 people.

Excitement was in the air as the helicopter scanned around the area, but as time passed it deflated and sentiments became more worrisome as the hours past with not much news. We had a deadline... If by 3pm we could not get to the ellies we would have to start again the next day as releasing them at night is not an option. They need to be aware of their surroundings so daylight is necessary. Priority was their safety and care. Moving into day two would have cost more and depending on the situation could be more complicated but if it meant they would be better off, then we would arrange it.

However, it was late morning when we heard they had found the elephants but they were some 30 kilometers away from the basecamp. They had moved that distance overnight despite the fact the reserve had strategically place alfalfa (lucerne) for them to graze on. Elephants have been known to travel up to 50 kilometers in one night.





Should the helicopter herd them closer to the basecamp?

No because they could get exhausted and more stressed being herded back a long way.

Do we cancel it and try it again the next day? Not yet... because we had time and the thankfully the cool weather was on our side. If it is too hot it adds to their stress and exhaustion and can be dangerous for them. They don't have an internal mechanism to self-regulate their body temperature, and being in a drought zone heat is an issue. They must get wet and use their gigantic ears to fan themselves.

Do we move the basecamp closer to them? If so that would require finding the right location where we could get the equipment through the bushveld and a space where there is room for all the equipment? Did we have time for that?

Thankfully, Kester Vickery of the translocation group had hundreds of animal translocation experiences under his belt and it was under his lead that a decision was made. He decided to relocate the basecamp closer to them. Why? Because it was less risky for the elephants. The weather was cool (but warming up), we had the machinery necessary to clear the way for us to get closer, it's faster for us to drive than herd them, and we had enough daylight hours to complete the job.

So within the next hour and a half we had moved closer to where they were situated and set up camp. It was shortly after that the radio started to buzz.... They were being herded and were close by! The excitement was back up to a high again as 10 minutes later we heard the helicopter over the ridge and got our first view of the family of elephants just a kilometer or so away.



READY, STEADY, GO! THE MAD DASH TO THE ELEPHANTS

First to be darted by the vet via the helicopter is the matriarch, a 25 year old that stands at 2.25 meters tall at shoulder height. Why is she first? Because the family bonds are so strong that when she falls asleep the whole family stays around her, their leader. This makes it easier to dart the remaining and helps logistically by having them close together.

The minute that happens we all jump into the designated vehicles and when given the command from the vet via radio we rush over to where they had fallen asleep. Lying on his side, the male teen bull is 200 meters away from the group and he is the first one I see as our group rushes upon the crowd that got there earlier than us. The translocation team uses chainsaws to clear the trees so that there is enough room for the large flatbed trucks to position themselves next to his body. The veterinarian already has checked the bull and has placed his large ear over his eye as to shield it from the dust and sunlight. A twig is placed at the tip of

trunk to keep it wide open and you can see the mammoth chest move deeply as he breathes in and out.

There is a lot of movement and noise going on between the seven elephants. The visitors are like an audience in a concert rushing to take their photo and selfies with the animals, the drone camera buzzing above, and the translocation team moving about purposefully completing their task as hand. Their roles are so well coordinated that I remain in the background to let people do their work and head over to where the matriarch was positioned.

It is the first time I have physically been close to an elephant and what a sight she was. Crouching down, I reach out to touch her trunk. It's heavy and the skin is thick with rough bristled hair. I feel her head and the vibrations of her breathing heavy with a rumble of a snore now and then. I feel the smoothness of her





photo credit: Skyhawk Photography

Crouching next to me is Andrew Rae, a walking encyclopedia and conservation advocate, a writer with a safari organizing company. Andrew is donating his time to cover the event, explaining that like people some elephants are left handed. The wear and tear on her left tusk is because she uses it more. My daughter and husband are left handed... tears start forming... I am overwhelmed with emotions being so close to this noble beast and understanding the commonality between us. We are mothers, both dedicated to educating our children so that they can survive and thrive, and both have intense family bonds that can never be broken.

It hits me to the core that the extension of that large front tooth, her tusk, is the main reason for her dangerous predicament of being hunted. Those teeth are used as a source of human

entertainment like piano keys and dice, carved decoration pieces and as a status symbol of wealth.

I can't stay long observing her as there is work to be done and I am there to help the film and camera crew. With a thick cloth strapped to their ankles, one by one the two smallest are slowly and gently lifted by crane into the small container truck. The rest follow behind in various open trailers which have a heavy rubber mat or platform. That platform is later used as a conveyor belt to pull them into the designated container that will transport them to Mapesu. They are gently placed with their heads facing towards the back on the back trailer. This position is deliberate as when they wake up instinct is to move backwards during an uncertain moment.



Before the matriarch is moved onto the trailer, they place a tracking collar around her neck that will allow us to monitor her movement at the Mapesu Private Game Reserve. Each person has a role and like clockwork the elephants are quickly placed on the trailers to be transported back to the basecamp. It takes only 40 minutes or so for the entire group.

At the base camp the next step begins which is moving them via the conveyor belt into the larger mobile container truck. They start by watering down the inside of the containers. This will help them cool off faster if their bodies are wet and by now at 3 pm the temperature rises to around 30 Celsius. The cool morning has now become a hot day. Time is of the essence and the animal transport team works together to get it done quickly minimizing the risk of overheating.

They place two trucks back to back with the doors open creating a tunnel. They pull the elephants two at a time from the trailer into the truck via the conveyor belt and start prepping to wake

them up. Right before they close all but the door connecting the two trucks. The veterinarian gives them medication to wake up before he steps out with all the others as it only takes only a few minutes for the medication to work.

I peek through the vent holes in the truck and see them wake up trying to get their balance. It is true, they do move backwards. The well-organized team ensures that within 40 minutes the truck with the special cargo is ready to move.

We give Mopane Bush Lodge a ring to let them know they are on their way home...

They have set up a covered station with snacks and drinks for guest and invitees. Everyone is stationed behind a second fence partially covered and far enough away so they don't disturb the elephants and yet have a good view of the ramp in which the elephants will walk down.

120 YEARS PLUS: A QUICK RELEASE

The elephants arrive in Mapesu in one large container. They back up the truck careful to the ramp that was built specifically for the release. I quickly head up to the top of the truck to assist the camera people documenting the moment these incredible pachyderms are re-introduced back into a landscape. It is 45 minutes before dusk and the beautiful glow of the evening sun cast a golden hue onto the thick mopane bushveld and with it brings a calming sense of right to a place where for over a 120 years elephants had not roamed.

Before the transport crew opened the doors the guttural call of the matriarch is heard and her sound vibrates up through the truck and our bodies. It is as if she is gently calming her family. As we look down into the truck we see trunks moving around smelling the air, ears flapping and slight pacing.

The anticipation is at a high but when the doors opens to their new home they do not move forward... Cameras are set, people are silently ready to film and snap pictures but nothing happens for a minute or two. It is not until one of the younger females builds enough courage, with a little prod, and quickly walk out to

scan the area before heading off cautiously to the farthest point of the boma (a three hectare total temporary holding area until they are comfortable with their surroundings). A minute after, with a more prodding the matriarch and her calf stepped down. She glances around and moves in the same direction as the first. The remaining family unit rapidly follow in succession with the teen bull being the last to leave the trailer. It was a magical sight from above to see them walk away into the golden bushveld.

As we all stood on top of the truck, it took us a minute or two to realize that the accumulated efforts of so many, the hard work, time and dedication it took to get them to this place was at an end. We climbed down and walk under the shade of the tarp where we all celebrated that they made it safe and sound to their new home.

Visit the Share Universe Foundation Facebook page for the latest information on the family.
<https://www.facebook.com/SharedUniverseFoundation>



photo: Skyhawk Photography



photo: Suscito Films



WITH ENORMOUS THANKS!

It had been a couple of years of exhausting work putting in Big5 fencing, upgrading dams and watering holes, filing of obstinate paperwork and certificates, achieving huge financing efforts (which is still needed for their care) and the complete and complex coordination of the massive undertaking in order to accomplish one of the greatest events of the area... The reintroduction of elephants to the Mapesu land.

There have been many people involved that really deserve recognition and thanks to all their hard work and perseverance this project is a success.

From the SUF/Mopane/SUV group: Christof Croetz du Plooy, Toine Knipping, Quinten Knipping, Michelle and Renhard Oosthuysen, Brigitte Eloff, Quinton Walton, James Hill, Rudi Viljoen, Jan Trump, Tara Lal, Anton Yao Kryger and Charles Perry and many others.

Extra special thanks to the people and representatives that brought this project forward. Rickert Botha, Dr. Salomon Joubert and others at Maremani Nature Reserve for their generous donation of the elephants, provisions and devotion. Kester Vickery, Co-founder of Conservation Solutions and his team for their expertise and guidance. Leon de Jager of LEDET, Joe Grosel of Tembele Ecological Services and the countless others involved that lent a hand or two.

Also a special thank you for their time and services to record, photograph and write about this extraordinary event: Harry Hill of 1440 Drone, Dominic White of Suscito Films, Andrew Rae of Rae Safaris, and Jay Roode of Skyhawk Photography.



We also thank you, the people reading this newsletter, for your support and encouragement. It has taken a large group effort to achieve this milestone so hats off to all and a huge "Thank you!"

Further conservation efforts are just starting... Let us know if you want to be a part of it! We'd love a helping hand.
contact@shareduniversefoundation.org.

INTRODUCING THE SUF CONSERVATION MANAGER

I have been in conservation for over five years now. What got me hooked in the first place was my grandfather, who would teach me about the birds and the trees during my school holidays, which I completely enjoyed. His influence helped in my decision to pursue being a conservationist after finishing school.

So at seventeen I set off after high school to move from Pretoria to Hluhluwe in KwaZulu-Natal (a coastal South African province) and started my three year field guiding and advanced nature conservation diploma through Bhejane Nature Training.

After graduating from Bhejane I was offered a conservationist's dream job of monitoring endangered species which included the big 5 plus wild dogs (my passion), cheetah, hyenas and vultures and for three years I worked monitoring all of them. In my last year and a half there I focused more on just wild dog monitoring as well as opened a project on a community game farm in which we place wild dogs and black and white rhinos on the property. It was a project I was responsible for running and it was the most amazing experience being able to bond with a pack of wild dogs. The job was so enjoyable that I never even wanted to take my mandatory vacation days because I would miss the wild dogs so much!

However, there came a point where I needed to move forward and venture into something a little different so I moved to the other side of the industry as a guide. It was something I really enjoyed as I could take photos which is something of a passion of mine and which I wanted get back into.

SUF GETS NL AND UK APPROVAL

Shared Universe Foundation NL and UK gets approved! Their website are now up and running you can make your donations in those countries by contacting them. Please visit the sites for more information.

Once again the call of conservation was nudging me and I was fortunate to find Shared Universe Foundation. I look forward to this new role to really make an impact on conservation in the area. I would like to see the Foundation become one of the leading conservation organizations in South Africa! As things move forward I will keep you up-to-date on some of the programs and initiatives of the Foundation as they develop further.

As a side note, with my love of dogs, I adopted one before arriving here as it has always been my dream to have the ultimate bush puppy!

Axel Primmer | Shared Universe Foundation



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A personal
invitation
to join the
ADVENTURE

Join us and be part of conserving the incredible South African Wilderness!

We invite you to join the journey and become an investor in Shared Universe Ventures.

Our vision is to become one of the best wildlife conservancies in all of Africa, offering a hands-on, up-close and personal experience to our investors while being a commercial success.

- ✓ No timeshare, you are a co-owner
- ✓ Enjoy a game reserve without the complexities and cost of personally managing one
- ✓ Contribute to the preservation of the great South African landscape and wildlife including the endangered rhino
- ✓ Realize your own dream lodge
- ✓ Enjoy the rights to use the Mopane Bush Lodge and other communal facilities
- ✓ Leave a legacy for future generations

For more information visit the website:
www.shareduniverseafrica.com/our-investments
or send us an email at contact@shareduniverseafrica.com