

Semester 1. Course 1st Half Of 2008

The new group of students arrived on Monday the 7th of January. In total 13 students from around the world came to Bushwise campus for a year that for sure will change their lives. Jo, Claire, Victoria, Tom, Jonathan, Jenny and Simon came from England, St.Clair, Richard and Casper from South Africa, David from Ireland, Israel from the USA and Geoffrey from the Netherlands. They arrived for a welcome braai in the evening at Bushwise only to find themselves 2 hours later watching their first wild leopard...What an amazing start of the course!

The first week was spent getting familiar to their new environment, the camp rules, the other students, cook Rosemary, laundry lady Lucy and the Bushwise teaching staff. A town trip to Hoedspruit and a fitting session provided the students with the uniforms and other important gear for a year in the bush. Ilze contacted Khaki fever beforehand so all the uniforms were available from the shelf! How good did the students look with the uniforms. Back at campus Mark, our Head Teacher, went through the safety and health procedures and finished off with an interesting theory class on Ethics of Guiding with lots of practical do's and don'ts. In the first week we did some awesome game drives in Makalali. Mark and Junior instructor Robin both worked at Makalali as guides and know the area very well. We had a quick glimpse of a Lioness with 4 cubs and saw Eland, Kudu, Zebra, Blue Wildebeest, Impala, Giraffe, Steenbok, Tortoise, Jackal and Chameleon. We spent two days at the Traffic Department in Tzaneen to book our Learners license and this proved to be quite successful plus a first experience for students to see how this is organized. To our relief all the students got their traffic numbers and booked their test dates for next week as it is essential to start the drivers license process as early as possible to be ready for the placements. We finished the week off with a class by Ilze on First Aid and a First aid exam which all passed. We are now all first aid responders!

In the second week the students met Sean, our senior instructor and went through a Bush survival skills class where a lot of practical exercises were done. The students were making rope, making a fire without matches, making bush tea, collecting edible plants and berries from the bush and trying out the orientation skills. Sean showed us that he has a lot of experience living from the bush and took us out on the first bush walk. A bush walk with a knowledgeable guide and teacher like Sean is one of the most rewarding things that you can do as there is so much new to see, smell, hear and touch. We looked at all the new insects, wildflowers, grasses and trees. We startled a beautiful male steenbok on our walk and watched in awe as it darted away through the bush. Whenever we returned from theory class, bushwalks or game drives our cook Rosemary was waiting with her delicious food and smile. In the evenings we heard the roar of the lions in Karongwe. Life cannot get better than this!

In our third week we drove to Tzaneen to do the drivers license theory test. The students studied hard on the theory manual during the weekend. Unfortunately 2 students did not pass the test but 8 other very happy students passed it first time. So there were a lot of happy faces on return at campus. Robin showed in a theory lecture that "Taxonomy is fun" and made the students aware of using the Latin names of organisms by giving them a practical assignment in Taxonomy. Our favorite topic! Rifle handling and practical shooting was on the agenda of this week. After a day on rifle theory and getting used to hold, clean and handle the heavy .375 rifle we went to Mica for a day of practical rifle training and experience where we had a lot of fun. All students were eager to hit the bulls eye and compare results with others. In the meantime Mark had picked up the new Land rover. Yes! We drove with 2 vehicles into Makalali for 2 days where the students did the pre-drive briefing and sat for the first time behind the wheel of a Land rover defender. They were guided by Mark and Robin how to drive the car on the bumpy roads. The students were so focused on driving that we nearly missed two feeding lions at a Zebra kill. What an impressive sight! They were two young male lions that form one of the 5 resident prides in Makalali. The zebra meat was nearly finished but the next great sighting of a herd of Elephants was around the corner with a youngster of two weeks amidst them well protected by the females. A large elephant bull in musth started to chase us. Robin had to reverse the Landi out the sighting really fast. The speed, size and power of this bull made us go all quiet. We finished the week off with a lesson from Robin in Shangaan,

the local language, and went for a week-end party at Twines camp in Makalali where volunteers from around the globe come to work and help with elephant research and wildlife conservation. On our way back from Twines we bumped into 4 spotted hyenas that are really bold at night and came very close to our cars. After this we danced and partied in our kitchen with Rosemary and Lucy. What a perfect week!

In the fourth week of this semester, that has flown by, the big test was coming up on Saturday so the students were studying in between the drives and the 4x4 Vehicle practical which Robin supervised. Students had to change a car tire using the heavy jack and got a first glimpse on the way how the high and low range gears worked as well the differential lock. After the 4x4 practical the students had to wash the cars and get them shining for our next game drive in Makalali. In the afternoon we drove off for a surprise sleep out near Garonga and slept under the big African starry night. The students collected fire wood and a quick introduction of the night sky was given by Mark and Robin. Suddenly the radio called in that a pride of lions was nearby so we went into the vehicles to the sighting. The braai was ready when we returned at the sleep-out spot and every student had to stand watch for 1 hour as we were camping in Big 5 country. An amazing first night under the clear night skies! In the morning on our bushwalk we discovered that a large elephant bull visited the sleep out spot! On our way back we spotted two cheetahs resting under a knobthorn tree. We spent half an hour with them before returning to camp. Sean went through the Ethology theory and the VPDA theory in our classroom which has sweeping views over our dam and the students rondavels. The big test is waiting on Saturday and then our week off!