

Bushwise Newsletter

Semester 3 **Mahlahla Campus**

After a good relaxing week off, we were treated to a birding/camping trip up into the nearby Drakensberg mountain range to a camping site called Mariepskop, but not before the usual camp clean up was done to get everything clean and in order for the new semester. After the camp clean up we had a bird lecture in preparation for the next couple of days when birding would be our main focus.

The next morning we packed our sleeping bags, packed the tents and some food and headed off to the camp site to begin the birding practicals. The weather was not the best for birding, as a light drizzle was falling in this amazing forested area. However, great fun was had by all at the campsite as it was situated next to a river with deep pools for swimming and tubing as well as the walks through the forest to get glimpses of those elusive forest birds. We even managed to get to the top of the mountain where the most spectacular views were had of the surrounding lowveld and we got to see the area around our local 'big' town, Hoedspruit and the area towards our campus at Mahlahla.



The Breath-taking view from Mariepskop

After a couple of glorious days in the mountains, we headed back to campus where we unpacked everything, dried out the tents and spent the evening at the dinner table, telling stories from our week off and our adventures on the mountain. Next morning was an early start with game drives in Makalali and the morning was spent mostly identifying birds but also increasing the student's knowledge on trees, grasses and mammals.

The next few weeks the students were kept very busy with lectures on various topics ranging from the geology of the area and how it was formed, to the different biomes in Southern Africa and the fascinating world of Fishes as well as Astronomy and Mammals. In between all of these lectures the students continued with the ongoing process of getting their drivers license. They all managed to write their learners exam with everyone passing with flying colours. They also managed to book test dates and complete the driver's

license test this semester! We are very proud to say everyone now has a South African driver's license. Well done students!!

The highlights of this semester would definitely be the amazing lion sightings. One in particular comes to mind - during a sleep out where we had the opportunity to camp under the stars in a dry river bed on the reserve. After tracking down the lions in the southern sections of Makalali, they were found walking down the road very relaxed and playful. The youngsters were playing around the vehicle, running up trees, all whilst the adults lay nearby and occasionally would join in on the fun that the youngsters were having!!

Leopard sightings were also very good this semester with a couple of female leopards being seen with cubs as well as males! They were quiet relaxed which afforded the students with some good leopard exposure to see their behaviour and to take some photos for the albums back home. Added to the leopard sightings numerous hyena sightings as well as elephant herds and bulls, white rhino sightings, very good general game behaviour and one evening we even managed to spot an African wild cat on its nightly travels. Seeing these smaller predators is highly rewarding as sightings of them are rare indeed!

The game drives done by the students present a chance for them to develop their skills in both driving the land rovers as well as guest relations and presentation of knowledge learnt. It is very rewarding indeed to see such a transition from when the students first arrived, with limited knowledge of the bush and the workings and relationships within the bush, to being able to do full game drives with confidence and with the knowledge and skills that they have gained over the past couple of months. We are very proud of our students and wish them good luck with their FGASA level 1 theory exam and practical assessments next semester!



Students on a drive, watching an ellie in the distance

We would also like to congratulate our instructor, Charles Delport, on obtaining his Level 3 qualification this semester. An excellent achievement indeed. Well done Charles!

Daryl Robinson and the Bushwise Team

www.bushwise.co.za

office@bushwise.co.za

Bushwise newsletter

Semester 3 **Garonga Campus**

The third semester of the first 2010 course at Garonga has come to an end. We received 250 mm of rain again this semester. What a great treat! The bush was looking to become very dry this winter with just over 300mm of rain received throughout the summer, but luckily the rain clouds prevented this. New wildflowers are coming up and there are lush grasses for the animals. A lion pride moved in last semester and we regularly see the two adult females with five cubs of about a year old. One of the elephant herds surprised us by showing off a new tiny elephant calf of around two weeks.



Elephant herd with the new calf (Calf is behind the snorkel!)

In this semester we decided to move camp to Manyeleti Game Reserve close and open to Kruger National Park. We stayed for 4 days in a pristine wilderness environment but were nearly washed out of the camp because of heavy rains. Unfortunately we did not see many animals because of these rains. We did do our Mammals theory class and practical presentations on site. The last night at Manyeleti we finished with a big quiz on mammals and music history. Group A performed extremely well and Group B had to improvise a performance. They decided to perform a remake of Michael Jackson's "Thriller video clip". It was fantastic and clearly the highlight of the evening.

Back home again we continued with our Advanced Rifle Handling classes and the students performed exceptionally well in the rifle exercises. Yes! This semester we had our sleep-out split in two groups on the lovely Garonga sleep-out deck overlooking a dam. The students were left there at sunset, had a delicious Take-away diner (Thanks Rosemary!) and picked up at sunrise again. They are getting much more tuned into the rhythm of the Bush and used to the Bush sounds now so everybody slept early and peacefully.



Group A on Matshenjaan (farting zebra) lookout near the Makutsi river.

At the end of the third semester we find that time has flown by again and that we are over the courses half-way mark. A good time to reflect on the first three semesters and the goals achieved thus far. Out of all the goals that we can hope to achieve during each course; bringing out a passion for the bush is the most important one. We feel that we are achieving this in the course and with our students. By focusing on this outcome we keep ourselves motivated and passionate as well. What a privilege to be in this reserve and to be able to pass on the passion to others around us. That is what guiding is all about!



Tree clearing from Madash (wild dog) road

Robin van Den Berg and The Bushwise team

www.bushwise.co.za

office@bushwise.co.za