



Transboundary Elephant Research Programme

ELEPHANT NEWSLETTER

March 2011

by

Michelle Henley

email: michelephant@savetheelephants.co.za

Postal address: P.O.Box 960, Hoedspruit, 1380

Tel: 015-7930369, Fax: 015-7930496

Web address: www.savetheelephants.org go to 'Regions' and then 'Southern Africa'

In this issue we feature Recent Elephant Collaring Operations, exciting Elephant Journeys, Elephant Facts, News Flashes and Sponsoring Opportunities

How Great Thou Art



Photo: Michelle Henley

Kruger team (Grant, Markus and Rodney from left to right) help to recollar Mac

MAC

Friday 13th August 2010 started at 4h00 with a hasty drive from the Associated Private Nature Reserves (APNR) to Phalaborwa gate in the Kruger National Park, where I met Section Ranger, Rodney Landela, to find Mac, a Great Tusker, whose movements we have been tracking over a vast range via satellite for more than eight years.

Once Rodney and I had located Mac by radio telemetry, the rest of the collaring team consisting of pilot, Grant Knight, and infamous SANParks veterinarian, Markus Hofmeyr, would join us.

Rodney and I followed the Very High Frequency (VHF) signal on foot over the undulating landscape covered in Mopani. Slowly we navigated our way through the sea of shimmering leaves. Distant horizons rose and fell in perfect shades of blue and violet. How beautiful the contrasts of time and colour are in Africa: mixes of ephemeral golden leaves with steadfast violet hills.....It felt good to be walking across the same landscape where Mac has roamed for almost 60 years. I looked forward to seeing him again, a gentleman that we had come to know since 2002, when he was first collared. He had just completed his annual musth cycle further South and was heading back North to the region between Shingwedzi and Letaba, where he would meet up with his familiar male companions while not in musth.

Rodney led us carefully past two large tusked-bulls, but they would prove to be nowhere near Mac's huge tusk size. Over time, Mac's tusks have increased exponentially in length and thickness. Gradually we heard the thuds of helicopter blades approaching in the distance. With the collar and drugs on board, we flew to locate Mac in the region where Rodney and I had picked up his signal. We spotted him striding gracefully across the ground below us, and I felt the warm welling of tears at the sight of one so majestic.

There are very few big tusked bulls left in Africa today, and it is a great privilege to catch a glimpse of one. Like sentinels of bygone eras, they represent benchmarks of successful conservation endeavours - symbols of beauty and age that are kept alive and protected, despite man's greed and the high price of ivory. The Kruger National Park and a few other conservation areas in Africa are to be commended for their vision and dedication to the protection of these magnificent individuals!

Mac slowly went down as the drug took effect.

The helicopter landed, and we set to work quickly to replace the collar. We took morphometric measurements and estimated his tusk size at 118lbs a side. While I took a dental impression to age him, Markus treated some wounds which he must have acquired while in musth. Markus asked if he

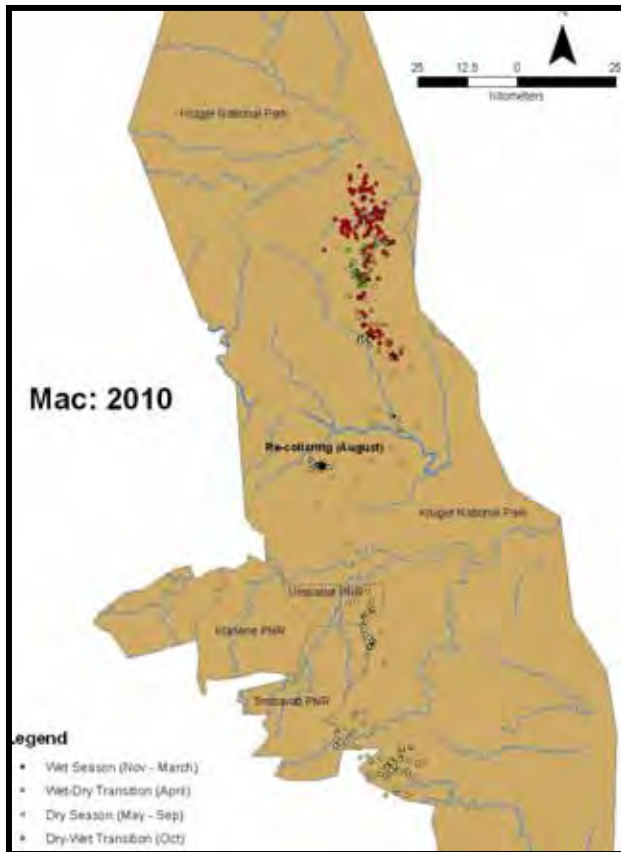


Photo Aat Vuik

could keep the counter weight of Mac's old collar. He wanted to display it on his desk and tell his sons Mac's story. It is befitting for the young to get to know the old that frequent these ancient landscapes, and a tangible counter weight would make the story real for them.

The helicopter hovered above while Rodney and I watched Mac rising majestically to his feet. With goodbye waves, silence slowly returned to the bush. We stood in reverence while Mac gave a deep sigh and turned round to head North again.

For your interest



- Mac is recognised as one of the longest and largest tusked, continually monitored elephants in Africa today.
- Mac's tooth casts placed him in the 50-55 year old category. He is on his last set of molars and they are already well worn which means that in all likelihood he will live approximately another 10 years.
- Mac's home range exceeds 5000km² which represents one of the biggest ranges we have monitored on Save the Elephants' collared elephants to date.
- We suggest you acquire the following wonderful books on the few remaining large-tusked bulls in Africa:
 - Marais, J & Hadaway, D. 2006. *Great tuskers of Africa*. Penguin Books, Johannesburg.
 - Marias, J & Ainslie, A. 2010. *In Search of Africa's Great Tuskers*. Penguin Books, Johannesburg.

- Aat Vuik has a website on which visitors to the Kruger National Park can post photos and sightings of large tusked or collared elephants: <http://www.tuskersofafrica.com>

Thank you

We would like to thank the Phyllis Gower Trust, administrated by the Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa (WESSA), for not only covering the cost of Mac's new collar but also the costs of the collaring operation. We are very grateful to the wonderful Kruger team for their continued support, efficiency and professionalism. Our appreciation goes to SANParks for their vision and effort and time they have dedicated towards the protection of Africa's large-tusked bulls.

Quote:

A great silence space holds all of nature in its embrace. It also holds you.

Eckhart Tolle

In memory of Irving and Yvonne



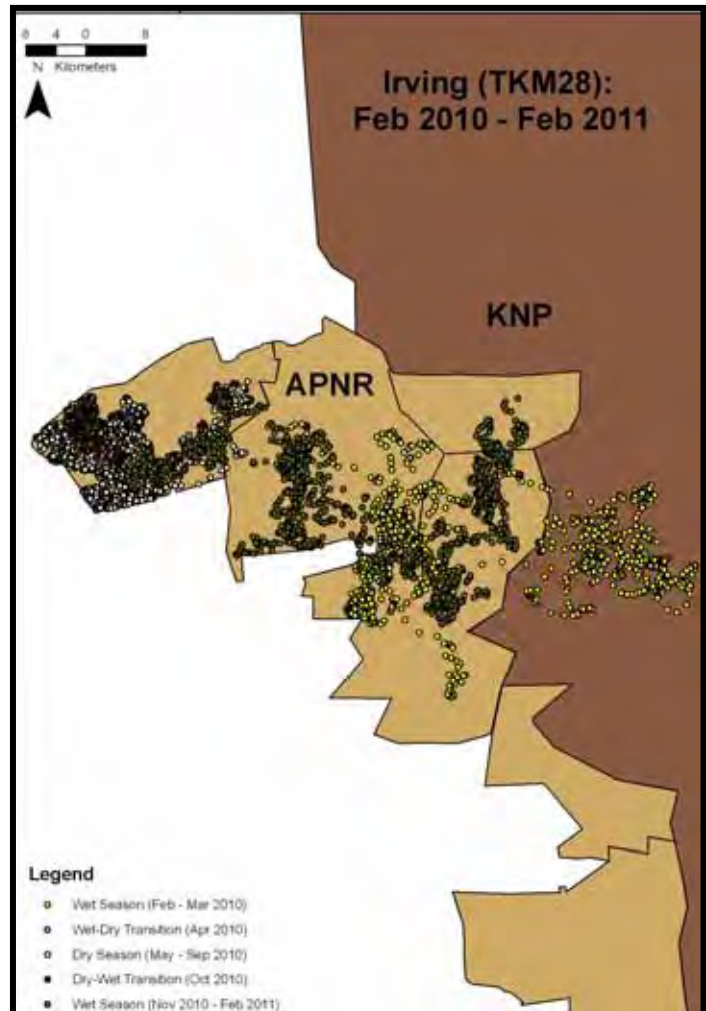
We first met Irving and Yvonne Tucker in 2008 when they visited us at the Elephant Research Centre while staying at Tanda Tula Safari Camp. The couple stuck us as wildlife enthusiasts with a warm, down-to-earth manner which was most engaging. Yvonne, in particular, was impressed with the project, and she expressed her wish to help us collar an elephant and participate in the event. Little did we know that in February 2010 Irving would return alone to Africa to collar an elephant in memory of his deceased wife.

IRVING

On the day that we set out to recollar a female elephant in honour of Yvonne, we were unable to locate a suitable elephant, so we decided instead to collar a bull, and call him Irving. The date was the 2nd February 2010. We have monitored Irving, the elephant, for over a year and have found that he roams widely across the reserves, from the East to the West. His left ear has characteristic notches, making him easily identifiable.

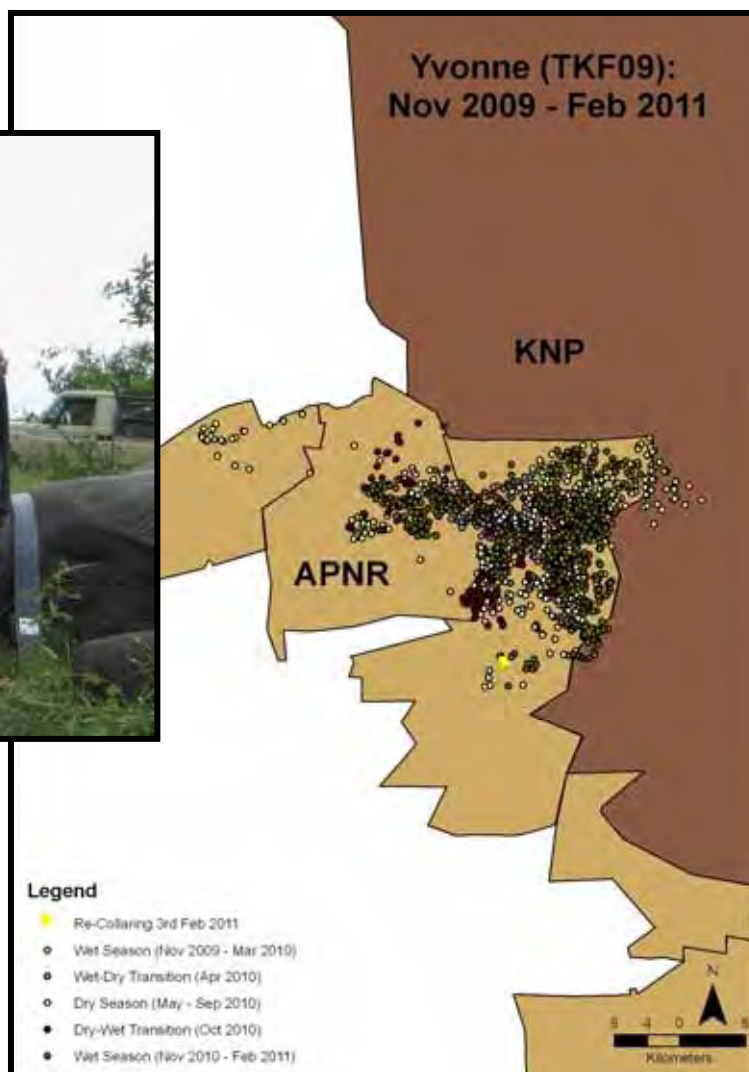
YVONNE

Exactly a year later, on 3rd February 2011, Irving Tucker kindly sponsored another elephant collar as well as the operational costs, as he had done the previous year. We were fortunate enough to locate a cow from the 'Grasses' herd whose collar needed to be replaced. When fitted with her new collar, she would be known as Yvonne. She was first collared in July 2007 when we removed a snare from her back foot. As this cow has a particularly gentle nature, we originally collared her and treated her wound using only a ground team. Fitting her new collar went smoothly, and we look forward to following her movements in the years to come.





Uncle Irving with Yvonne the elephant



Yvonne by Irving Tucker

Yvonne was born and lived in Hampstead London. When she was 18 she went to stay and work for nine months for her cousin in Johannesburg. We briefly met in South Africa, caught up again in London and soon after got married back in SA. I had bought a 52 acre farm at Broederstoom on the Crocodile River and we built a stone house there together.

All my friends were amazed how quickly and well Yvonne took to life in SA. She was quite happy staying alone on the farm when I was away on business. All our holidays were spent camping in the mountains or bush which she loved.

We left for the UK in 1974 and did not visit again until 1994 and since then we had been back every year for six weeks during the grim British winter. Most of the time we spent camping in Botswana, or staying on a friend's game farm near Musina. There were no big cats on the farm and Yvonne would go for a three hour walk every morning at day break and come back with enthusiastic tales of what she had seen.

Yvonne very sadly died suddenly of ovarian cancer in August 09. It has been a really nice and fitting tribute to have collared her Elephant which is now freely roaming the African bush she so loved.

Irving Tucker has also passed away since the collaring on 16th February 2011. We would like to express our condolences to his family and friends. When we track these two elephants in the field, we will share the moment in spirit with you, Irving and Yvonne.

Keeping Track of Familiar Elephants

GOWER

In addition to Yvonne, we recollared two elephants on 3rd February 2011. The second collar was deployed on a large bull named Gower, who was first collared in October 2006 with funds from the Phyllis Gower Trust administered by WESSA. We first sighted Gower in December 2003, and thereafter in May 2004. When we sighted him again in February 2006, he had broken his left tusk. In November 2007 we discovered that he had broken his right tusk as well. When in musth, Gower is a quite a character to contend with, so it is very likely that he possibly lost his weapons of rivalry while in musth.



Photos by Michelle Henley

Loosing ivory over time: Gower starting with two tusks in 2003 and ending with stumps by 2007.

TUSSLE



Photo Sarah Bergs

Next we moved on to a young bull named Tussle whom we met for the first time in December 2005. Both his small tusks were broken at the tips. Tussle was first collared in September 2006. He is slowly maturing into a larger bull, and we look forward to his first musth cycle.



Photo Michelle Henley

PROUD

Driving in the pitch dark towards the airstrip in the Klaserie on 16th February 2011, we came across three lions slinking off the road into the long grass. Anticipation was running high for Bruce Jenkin's guests who had rallied to sponsor a collar for a bull known as Proud. We have known Proud since October 2005, and collared him in November 2006. We have watched him come into his own over the years, and we were all awestruck by his magnificent size. While he lay snoring on his side, the group was able to marvel at the detail of his weathered feet and to touch the soles that had made tracks for many years on the granitic soils of the APNR. We look forward to following his tracks for many more years to come.



Bruce Jenkins and his business associates proudly looking over Proud

CLASSIC

Classic is one of the iconic Big Tuskers that we have known since the inception of our research programme in 2003. His name hales from his exquisitely symmetrical tusks which make him look like classical paintings of elephants from bygone eras. He was first collared in May 2004, and has become a familiar acquaintance to us. We have been privileged to meet with him many times in his regular haunts in the Mopani thickets of the Umbabat and were delighted when Nelda Villines offered to pay for his replacement collar.



Nelda Villines with Classic

Over the years we have watched Classic's peaceful demeanour change into a powerful presence while in musth. We have seen him lose one of his magnificent tusks which we hope will be recovered one day. It is hard to put into words how it feels to stroke the gnarled forehead of a prime bull whose crinkles and lines are etched into our memories after the long hours spent watching him rest up against a tree. Nelda, who had flown out from Sudan, found the experience of meeting Classic at close quarters deeply rewarding. In silence and with respect we watched Classic get back onto his feet to join the likes of Proud in their bull area.



Classic in musth



Resting



Photos by Michelle Henley

Classic with one tusk

LAPAJUMA

The last elephant to be recollared on 16th February was Lapajuma, who had first been collared with Gower in October 2006. Seeing her stretched out in the long grass made us realise just how small the cows are in comparison to bulls like Proud and Classic.

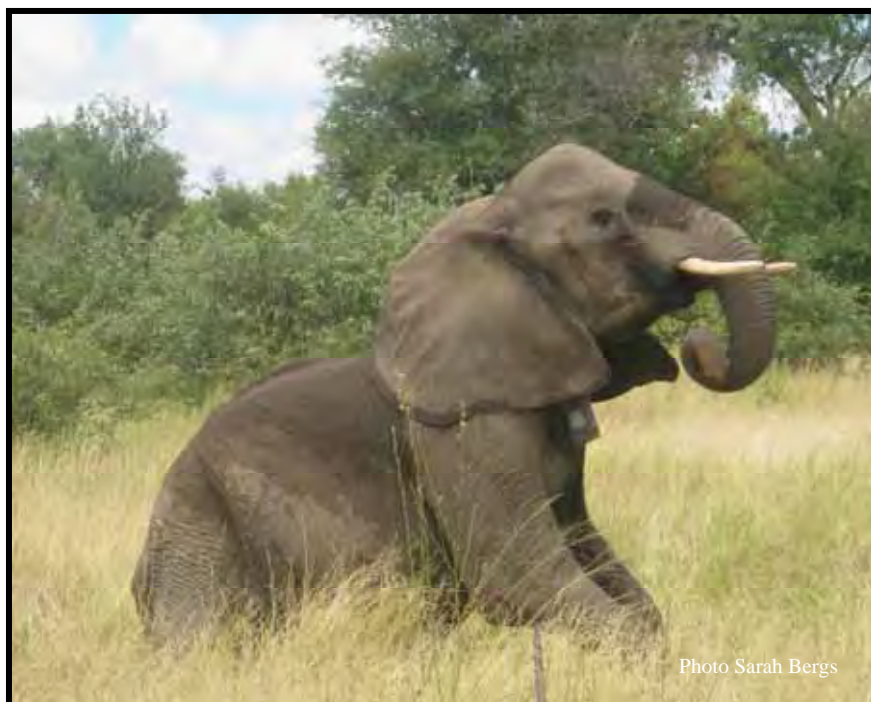
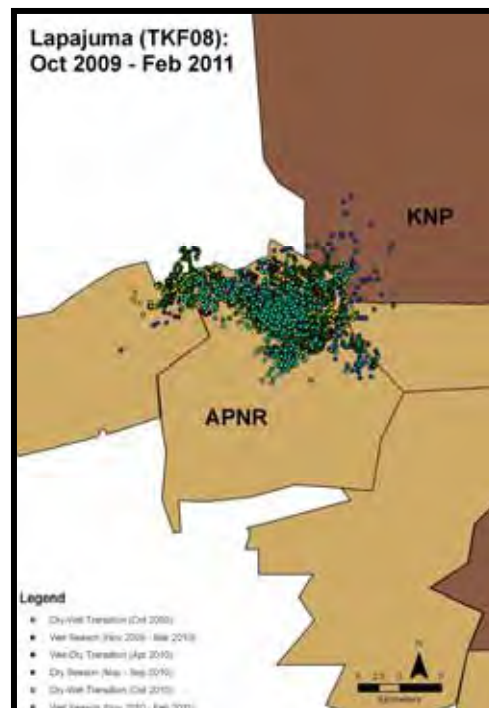


Photo Sarah Bergs



Thank you

We would like to thank Irving Tucker for the support and interest that he showed in the programme. We really appreciated his eagerness to not only cover the cost of new collars but to contribute towards the collaring operational costs as well. The Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa (WESSA) is thanked for administering the funds from the Phyllis Gower Trust which enabled us to recollar Gower. WESSA also kindly covered part of the helicopter bill for the first collaring operation. To Bruce Jenkins' group and Nelda Villines, thank you for sponsoring collars. We would also like to thank UNISA for sponsoring two of the collars that were deployed. Chris Pearson from Wildcon Safaris and Events is thanked for covering most of the collaring expenses for the second operation. We are very grateful to Wildlifelives.com and in particular to Cobus, Johan and Louis. It is always such a pleasure working with wildlife veterinarians of your calibre. Ben Osmers from Big Game Heli Services, your flying skills are spectacular and we appreciate your reliability and skill. Tanda Tula Safari Camp is thanked for the wonderful lunch presented to all the collaring operation participants. Thank you to the management of Timbavati and Klaserie Private Nature Reserve for ensuring the safety of all the participants and for organising the capture permits. Last but not least, thank you to all the participating guests for joining us and for appreciating the experience.

WHO'S-WHO.....?

This regular feature will serve as an introduction to individual elephants. Here we feature a bull named Kumana who was recently seen on Addger in the Timbavati Private Nature Reserve.



KUMANA, with his impressive ivory and characteristic ragged right ear, was first photographed by Anja Stolk at Kumana Pan between Tshokwane and Satara in the Kruger National Park. On 20th September 2010 Vanessa Gueli saw him north of Tshokwane. On 2nd February 2011 we watched him cross from Kruger into Addger when he graced our western study site with his magnificent presence whilst in full musth. We hope that Kumana will continue to enter the APNR in search of females and become an annual visitor.

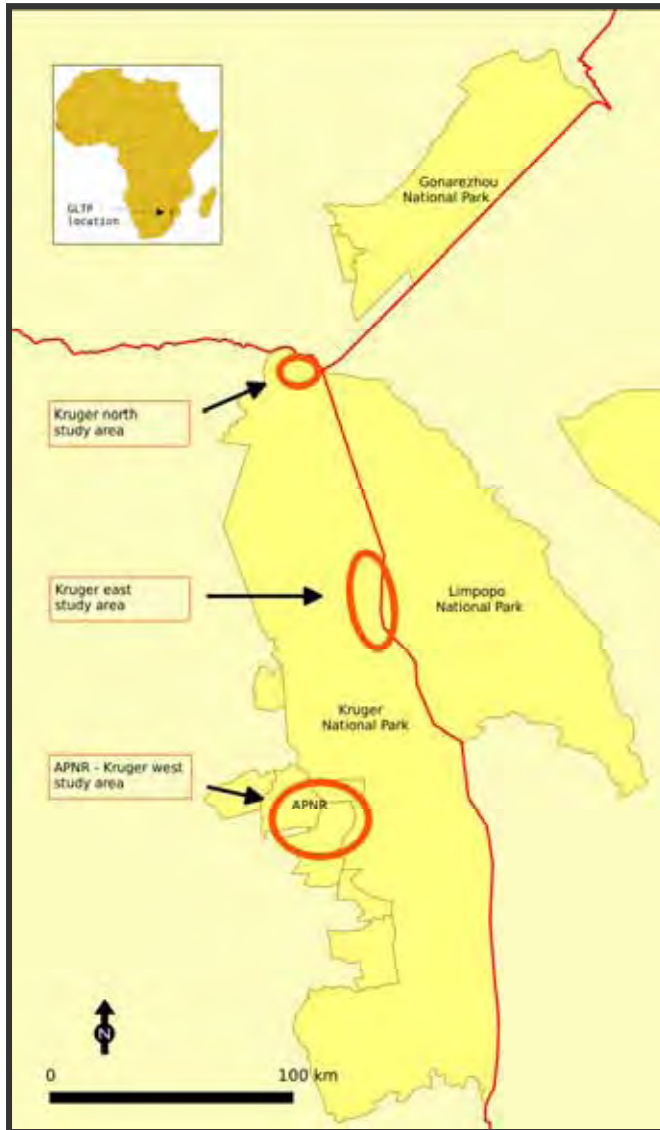
As large-tusked bulls are becoming increasingly rare in Africa, we would like to record all sightings of big tuskers and potentially big-tusked individuals. Please report any sightings and send us photographs were possible for our records.

As part of our work, Save the Elephants is recording sightings of large tuskers in all our study sites in Africa.

Visit <http://www.tuskersofafrica.com/tuskersnp/kumana.htm> to see more photos of Kumana.

News from up North

by
Steve Henley



The Makuleke Contractual Area of the far northern Kruger National Park (KNP), between the Levuvhu and Limpopo Rivers and commonly referred to as the Pafuri region, is unusual from a KNP elephant perspective. While it is well utilised by family groups and bulls in the dry season, with the onset of the summer rains these animals disperse from the area, returning only with the next dry season. Furthermore, elephants in this area are unusually nervous compared with elephants elsewhere in the Park. It has been suggested that in the wet summer months they move beyond the border of the Park, into neighbouring farming areas, returning to the sanctuary in the dry months when pressure from farmers and hunters is greatest.

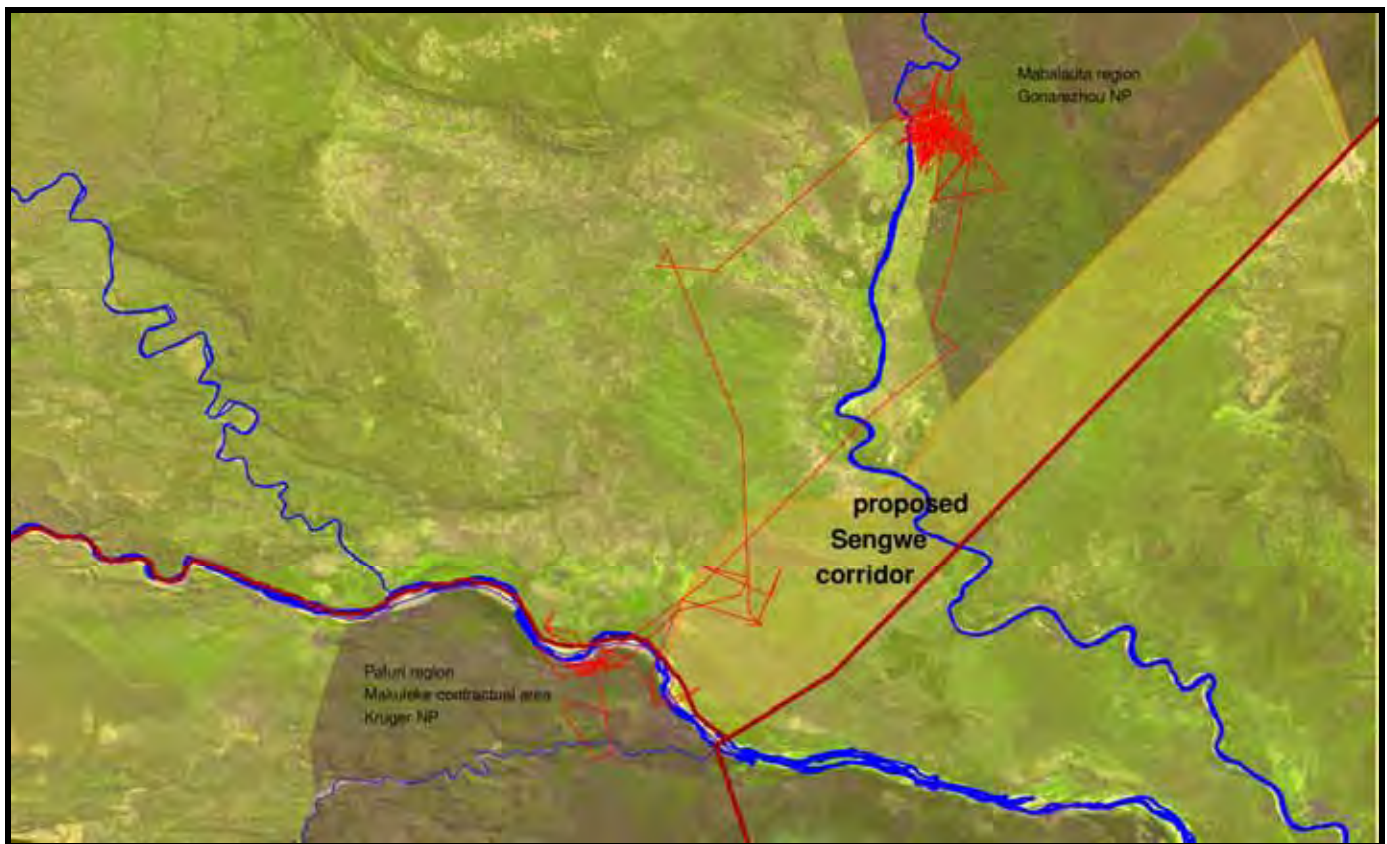
In 2007 Save the Elephants – South Africa (STE-SA) was approached by Chris Roche of Wilderness Safaris, one of the lodge concessionaires in the Pafuri region, and asked if we would undertake a study of elephant movements in the area. The motivation being that it would provide important data for the management of elephants and the appropriate zonation of KNP. In conjunction with other STE projects in the area, it will also improve our

understanding of elephant biology within the greater ecosystem and elucidate the role of key resource areas. Finally, this would be the first attempt to establish the extent to which the elephant populations in the far northern KNP are linked with those of southern Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe and help define a biologically meaningful corridor linking these two Protected Areas as is the vision of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

If there is regular movement by many elephants we assume that this would be made apparent through telemetry tagged elephants. Hence by October 2009 we had deployed 12 GPS-satellite collars on six cows and six bulls. However, if there is occasional movement of a few individuals the limited number of animals being monitored with collars means there is a substantial probability that we would miss the exchange. For this reason we have also undertaken to identify the individual elephants in the

Pafuri region. Sightings of elephants from southern Gonarezhou will be compared with the register of known individuals to determine if and how many KNP elephants are amongst those from Gonarezhou. For this reason we undertook a trip to Gonarezhou in the middle of the wet season and the time of year the elephants vacate the Pafuri region of KNP. The first trip was primarily to introduce the project to the Zimbabwean Parks officials in the field and to evaluate the feasibility of collecting meaningful data. While the vegetation in Gonarezhou National Park is dense and the elephants quite nervous, in seven field days we had 15 elephant sightings. We plan to undertake two trips to Gonarezhou in the coming months to collect sightings data more rigorously and hope to also make use of camera traps to collect identification photographs from more remote parts of the Park.

Movement data from the collared elephants have been gathered for almost a year now and in this time one bull, Gila, has made a brief return journey from KNP to Gonarezhou. He moved rapidly and mostly at night through communal farmlands north of the proposed Sengwe corridor, a strip of land approximately 10 km wide which runs parallel to the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border and which is intended to connect Gonarezhou National Park with the other Protected Areas of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. Contrary to our expectations, he undertook the trip in the middle of the dry season.



Gila's return trip from northern KNP into Gonarezhou

Thank you

We are very grateful to the African Elephant Conservation Fund of the United States Fish and Wildlife Services for financially supporting this project for two years. We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to SANParks, Sandra Basson, her Field Rangers and the Kruger National Park Veterinarian Services for their support and commitment; Wilderness Safari Camp and

Walter Jubber for the effort they have made and continue to make in the research programme. ConservAfrica and the Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust have sponsored collars and collaring costs as well as accommodation respectively. The Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa have also kindly covered the cost of one of the collars that were deployed. Tanda Tula Safari Camp is thanked for their support of the Research Headquarters within the Timbavati Private Nature Reserve.

FACT-FILE: Feet and locomotion *

As we will be Running for Elephants (see page 15), some facts on the locomotion of elephants may be appropriate for this issue:

- All elephants have five digits in both fore and hind **feet** but African elephants usually have four toenails to each forefoot and three to the hind **feet**.
- Elephants move very silently when they **walk** because the bones of the **feet** rest on a spongy pad which acts as a shock-absorber.
- Elephants effectively **walk** on tip-toe as the great fatty matrix in which the toes are embedded act as a cushion.
- When an elephant places its weight on its **foot** it splays out to distribute the weight evenly. As soon as the foot is lifted the circumference becomes smaller. This evolutionary adaptation is important when walking through mud in order to prevent suction.
- The horny plantar region of the **foot** can be fissured in unique ways which could make individual identification possible.
- Elephants **move** at an average pace of 10 kph.
- Their shuffling trot averages about 20-24 kph. Top **speeds** average 30kph while others claim as high as 40kph with a span of up to 4m across.
- African elephants are **winded** in about 450-550m but soon recover.
- Although elephants can neither **jump**, **canter** nor **gallop**, they can clear an obstruction as high as 1.2m in their stride.
- Frightened elephants have been found to **travel** as far as 145km between daylight and dark.

*Spinage, C. 1994. *Elephants*. T & A D Poyser Natural History, London.

News Flashes

- **MEET THE TEAM:**



We have some new team members based in the field at our Research Centre at Tanda Tula Safari Camp. We would like to introduce them (from left to right): Jess Lavelle (GIS technician), Prins Nakuna (Field officer), Michelle Henley (Programme manager) and Sarah Bergs (Communications and Educational Officer).

- **KEEP IN TOUCH**



We are now on face book! Please become a fan by searching for Save the Elephants – South Africa's Fan page <http://www.facebook.com>



Follow us on Twitter for daily updates http://www.twitter.com/STE_SA



Read our blogs on the website <http://www.savetheelephants.org/south-africa-fielddiary.html> and



keep in touch with Sarah Bergs' adventures <http://www.travbuddy.com/sarahbergs>

- **NAMASTE**

We regret to inform you that in October 2010 we lost one of our study animals when he left the protection of the APNR. This young bull had an incredible home range of over 8000km² and was only nine years old when we first collared him. He represented an extremely valuable study animal. Namaste, the adventurer, 'we respect you'.

- **FUNDING PARTNERSHIPS**

We are very grateful to all the landowners and interested parties that have submitted photographs and made financial contributions towards the project. A comprehensive list of all contributors will be periodically updated on our website. Please visit www.savetheelephants.org, navigate to 'Regions' then go to 'South Africa'

We are **PLEASED** to announce that online donations can soon be made by clicking on our **'DONATE'** button!

www.savetheelephants.org/south-africa-donatenow.html

An EFT transfer of funds can also be made to: Save the Elephants – South Africa (STE-SA), Account number: 331632284. Standard Bank. Hoedspruit branch Code 0572752, Swift code SBZAZAJJ, NPO number: 055-871-NPO, PBO number: 930030852

Currently we are running a campaign to help us raise much needed funds. **You can help** by

- Joining our **Running for Elephants** campaign to raise funds to assist us in purchasing a **new vehicle** for field work as our trusted Land Rover is slowly becoming 'not so trusted'



- Read all about how you can become involved on the next page.....

WE ARE...RUNNING FOR ELEPHANTS in 2011...!!



Please help **Save The Elephants – South Africa (STE-SA)** speak with our feet as we kick up dust at our **first** event...

The Xstrata Long Tom Marathon on **26th March 2011**

Please **support our team** and contribute generously towards Securing a Future for Elephants in the Greater Kruger Ecosystem

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- **SPONSOR** a collared elephant (aka STE-runner) who will be running the race.
- Raise **FUNDS** in your work organisation or amongst friends. No amount is too small!
- EFT **DONATIONS** to Standard Bank account : 33 163 228 4, Branch code: 57 27 52, Swift Code: SBZA ZA JJ
- **DONATE ONLINE** via Just Giving on www.savetheelephants.org
- **JOIN** us on the day and get your friends and family to sponsor you. Go to www.longtominfo.co.za for more information on the race.
- Come and **SUPPORT** the team, be there to soak up the atmosphere, or just drum up some support wherever you are!

All proceeds go to STE-SA Transboundary Research Project

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT



SAVE THE ELEPHANTS

SECURING A FUTURE FOR ELEPHANTS

www.savetheelephants.org