



With many thanks and elephants hugs

Story by Dr Michelle Henley



As the year draws to an end one always tends to look back on what has been accomplished. With the realisation that much has been achieved, one appreciates that this is due to the support and interest coming from many people and organisations. Therefore, I thought it appropriate to use this opportunity to thank you all, share some of the year's highlights and to briefly tell you what lies ahead.

We are very grateful to the SATIB Conservation Trust and Jaguar Land Rover South Africa for their donation of a 2014 Land Rover Freelander 2 SD4 SE. It is a real treat to glide around the Reserve in near silence!



On World Elephant Day we enjoyed support from both the local and international community as we built a cardboard replica of the largest recorded elephant which once measured 4m at the shoulder. Although it represented an enormous task to construct, paint, transport and erect, it was well worth all the effort. Numerous people throughout the world kindly contributed R50 (or \$50) towards a coloured square which we pasted on our homemade paper-pachyderm. The phone buzzed and emails kept streaming in from remote sponsors while local young and old visitors came in person, to write their messages on their colourful square. It was heart warming to see how concerned people were about the unsustainable poaching of elephants across Africa. All the terms of endearment soon transformed the



grey giant into a rainbow mosaic of support which was then featured on SABC news. We are very grateful for the local interest we received from Hoedspruit. Pick 'n Pay proudly displayed the elephant at their entrance, Buco supplied a ladder which helped us locate any out-of-reach squares, Protrack supplied the transport for the elephant while PostNet printed enlargements for a photographic raffle, free of charge. To each and every person who sponsored a square, we appreciate your effort and value your concern.

Then we were privileged to re-collar Intwandamela (He who greets you with fire in his eyes) in the Manyeleti Game Reserve. Thank you to John Bassi who flew free of charge in support of our programme, Dr. Ferreira du Plessis for being the veterinarian in charge, African Wildlife Tracking for supplying the collar, Mark Bourn for keeping tabs on the elephant whilst in Manyeleti and all our supporters who contributed financially towards the overall



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running expenses of this operation. We hope to be recollaring another three elephants in the foreseeable future.

The Global March for Elephants and Rhinos, hosted by Zandspruit Aero and Wildlife Estate, started off with a presentation on what is happening to elephants on a continental scale – one elephant is being poached every 15 minutes! We then joined all the citizens who voiced their solidarity with footfalls and conversations of concern. We were very grateful to *Relate* for producing a limited edition of bracelets to highlight the plight of elephants. To each and every one of you who participated, thank you for caring and joining the ripples of awareness that moved across the globe on this particular day.

Last but not least, we are very grateful to Colin Rowles for his support, tireless sense of humour amid trying times and the dedicated protection of the animals under his stewardship. To each and every landowner in the Klaserie Private Nature Reserve (KPNR) who has kindly sent us elephant pictures, we appreciate working in your Reserve and value the extension of our research contract for another five years, thus representing almost two decades of elephant research within your area.

In the months to come, we look forward to telling you more about some interesting findings related to the collared elephants and our surveys on large trees and elephants' effects on these. You will be fascinated by a bees, ellies and trees project (BET) which we hope to get off the ground and kept up to date with the launch of our new website under our new name: Elephants Alive.



Story and photos by Jacquie Gauthier

While we were indulging in some divine downtime at Angela's camp, we had the absolute privilege of watching a small group of seven elephants cavorting in the riverbed. They waded back and forth between the banks, stopping on each side to splash, roll in the mud or just rest against the embankment.

They rubbed themselves on rocks, and rubbed each other with their trunks. Big and small alike took turns trying to climb up the slippery slopes, only to watch each other slide back down into the water. It was sheer joy to behold! As I write this I am still basking in the afterglow of the first ever Global March for Elephants and Rhinos. Thousands upon thousands of people in 136 communities across six continents came together to urge all of our governments to protect our precious wildlife. I am proud to say that Hoedspruit was among those communities with citizens coming out in full force to celebrate these magnificent creatures and to realise how perilously close we are to losing them forever.

It is estimated that an elephant is poached every 15 minutes across Africa – that's 96 a day, or 36 000 a year. If the killing continues at this rate, there will be no elephants left in the wild in 2025. This is the deciding decade, a critical time in the life of this beautiful, important animal.

The elephant is what is known as a keystone species. Their activity influences the landscape, the plants and the other animals around them. When they knock down a tree, other animals gain access to the leaves for food and a new place to build a nest and breed. There is no better propagator of plant life. Their droppings deliver seeds to new locations, conveniently encased in fertiliser. Their impressive footprints catch rain water creating small pools for other animals to drink from. Virtually every move they make creates ripples through the ecosystem. The landscape of the African bush will be forever changed without their majestic presence. There are many organisations working to ensure the survival of elephants. Let's throw our support behind them to ensure the survival of this magnificent species.

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