



# EXPEDITION DIARY Caprivi 2008

By Peter Schütte

12 August

Hello and welcome to the Caprivi diary for 2008. I am Peter Schuette, your expedition leader, and you will be hearing from me regularly over the next few months as I update you on what's happening.

Some admin first: my phone number in Namibia will be +264 (81) 3957863. Please note that this is for emergency purposes only, for example if you are about to miss assembly or something along those lines.

As I write this, we are packing up our equipment, ready to fly down to Africa to get things set up for you. There will be three of us initially. Malika Fettak, our star intern and general Biosphere slave, Dr. Matthias Hammer, our founder and Managing Director, and yours truly. Together well be arriving in Namibia over the next few days on different flights and making our way to the Caprivi delta. Well have all the setting up to do and we are very excited to see the research station in all its operational glory (we hope!) soon. Julia & Francois, our resident scientists, have worked very hard over the past few months to get the research station built and ready for you, and in fact much of your money has gone into building it. So before you even lift a finger with data collection, you can see where your money went! (Talking about money – if you have not yet returned your paperwork and paid your balance, then you are a day late now. Go on – make our job a bit easier by not having to chase you!)

Incidentally, this “building a research station from team member's dosh” is tried and tested model of Biosphere Expeditions - providing interest-free loans to our scientists to build research stations that we then use over the years with the scientists providing “free” accommodation until the loan is paid back. That way we generate capacity, local jobs and facilities and in the end our scientists have a research station that belongs to them to do their research & conservation work, generate income from and provide employment for local people. Everyone wins, everyone's happy – at least that's the general plan ;)

Anyway, I digress. So the three of us will be in Namibia over the next few weeks, setting up, playing film stars with a team from the ZDF (a very large German public broadcaster) before the first team arrives and generally trying to make sure that you have beds to sleep in and some food to keep you going. You hope ;))

Malika and Matthias will then be with us for a week of the first slot, before travelling the world again on other projects. Then you'll be all mine!

I hope you are all looking forward to coming out to help us in this beautiful part of Africa. Team 1 especially will be trailblazers where teething problems will probably abound until we get into the groove. So please all come with your best sense of humour, ready to muck in and be real expeditioners (not tourists!). For those of you who are coming to Africa for the first time, you are in for some amazing experiences. For those of you with experience of Africa, get ready to experience it differently and away from all the comfy lodge for the white man rubbish ;)

See you in a few weeks. Have fun packing and safe travels!

Peter Schuette  
Expedition leader

P.S. You may not hear from me again until the expedition starts, so don't panic and assume that no news is good news ;) But then again you may well hear from me. This is Africa, you know!

22 August

Just a quick one from the field, where base is up for you (more or less) and we are frantically trying to get ready ;)

Showers are hot (one each for the boys & girls), toilets are flushing (also one each for the boys & girls) and your reed & bamboo huts are up in all their wonky glory. It's hot & dusty, but can get chilly at night, so make sure you bring at least one set of warm clothing. Amazing sunsets, pitch-black skies with millions of stars & the Milky Way, the sounds of lions, elephants, hippos & countless birds at night are naturally part of it all. There's also a leopard with her cub who's taken a fancy to camp, visiting at night.

Went for a short drive around the study site yesterday. The waters are still high after a record flood, so if you are not used to the water getting up to the bonnet when crossing "puddles", better get acquainted with the idea and the sound of water rushing through the gaps in the doors.

Saw elephants, hippos, kudus, baboon and countless birds on that short drive. No decent maps of the place, of course (you'll be creating them), and virtually nothing in terms of infrastructure. So its back to GPS & compass navigation and welcome to "Wild Africa Junction" - we didn't call the expedition that for nothing ;)

24 August

Yesterday was a fun day. We went for a recce into the park, then for an afternoon swim in a hippo pool. So far, so good.

Then a tyre lost air & we had to change it, then I dropped my mobile into the water, then we drive back as the sun set to find a park ranger stuck in the mud. We tried to help with one of our two vehicles and got that stuck too. Three hours later we were totally covered in stinking bog water, cold, muddy, with leeches on our legs, bitten by mosquitoes and one car down, which after jacking countless times to get it out, we had to abandon for the night, because it refused to start once we almost got it out!

All fun & games, though, and we were laughing as we toiled. We managed to help the ranger out eventually & drove back in the dark with his car and the second Land Rover. Every pool (17) we passed had a crocodile in it and we saw civet and African wild cat scuttling around in the dark.

We've just recovered the lost vehicle & are back on track, literally.

Important lesson for everyone: off the tracks, you will get stuck. On the tracks you may get stuck. Don't take any risks otherwise you'll be jacking, digging and winching in the mud all day & night :)

I bet that with each diary entry, you are increasingly looking forward to joining us in the bush & mud, aren't you?

1 September

Not much to report other than elephants migrating past base, hippos grunting at night, a leopard in the bush & lots of shopping & still more preparation work going on.

It's still hot, it's still dusty & today the wind has whipped up so that we now have it in our eyes & teeth too :)

There's also a bit of a problem with termites, so some of you may be sleeping to the sound of gentle munching & crunching. That is if we don't decide to call in the chemical artillery first.

See the first lot of you soon!

16 September

What can I say other than it's been a hectic and eventful time since I last wrote. The main news is that we've caught & collared our first leopard yesterday. Other than that the last couple of weeks have been tales of getting ready, team 1 arriving, cars breaking down & getting stuck, plans changing constantly, attempts of tooth extraction in the field by a qualified dentist team member, team 1 being a model of flexibility & effort, herds of elephants walking past camp, wrecking the access road, holding up our work and generally making a nuisance out of themselves ;), some boiling hot days, lots of sand and dust, and things being as they tend to be with a brand-new expedition trailblazing its way into a groove. Suffice it to say that we're not quite there yet, so come prepared for some organised chaos!

Now some admin. Reading through the kit list, you do NOT need a "mess kit: non-breakable camping cutlery and crockery, and a non-breakable mug", as we are packing a dinner box for the capture team staying out at night that basically has everything in it you need. Instead you DO need a travel mosquito net that you can take out with you on the overnight capture activity, sling up under a tree and go to sleep under the stars. The smaller this net packs down, the better, as it will be used for your overnight fly camps and may need to be put up and taken down at short notice as you chase lions, leopards and other predators to capture them for collaring or follow their collar signals around the study site.

You also need N\$300 (Namibian Dollar) in cash for me if you want to do the river cruise on the rest day on Saturday. There is little opportunity to change money into N\$ in Livingstone, as Livingstone is in Zambia, so I recommend you change some money at home. You are very unlikely to get Namibian Dollars out of your bank – instead you can change your money into ZAR (South African Rand), which is accepted all over Namibia at a rate of 1:1 as the two currencies are linked.

So please make sure you bring at least 300 Rand with you in cash. We also run a bar service at camp for soft drinks, beer and wine, so if you bring 2000 Rand (approximately 200 Euros or 160 Pounds Sterling or 300 US Dollars), then this also gives you some cash for drinks from the bar, souvenirs, etc.

Confused? I am sure you're not – just bring 2000 Rand cash with you and you will be fine. And to make things even clearer, I am attaching the plans of what you'll be doing once you are out here.

20 September

After dropping the first team in Katima Mulilo yesterday, where the shuttle to Livingstone collected them, today we have some time to re-org. As I sit here in Katima on the Zambezi river, looking over to the other side to Zambia, I just wanted to give you a summary of what happened over the last few days.

Buffaloes are increasing in the vicinity around camp and with them are the lions. And, indeed, the capture group found some lion tracks and on Tuesday night they tracked four lions in the dense bush, but lost them again in an hour-long search.

But then on Wednesday Francois took Viv, Inge, Francoise and Ronel out for the night when they spotted three lions of yesterday's group of four. Quickly Francois darted one female with the dart gun, then lay her on the Land Rover pick-up to fit a collar. What a lifetime experience for the team – I am sure no one from this capture team will ever forget touching a wild lion in Mamili NP!

And for our project this is great news too; one collared leopard and one lion, so the monitoring of the predators can start from now on!

But on the back of all this excitement, the other activities are no less important for the project! We established vehicle game count routes and foot transects for counting spoor and game. During these activities we found tracks of leopard, hyaena, wild dog and spotted lots of game such as wildcat, serval, kudu, duiker, warthog, reedbuck, steenbok, bushbuck, elephant, hippo and lots of birdlife, such as eagle, heron, etc. It is a very special experience to go walking with a guide/ranger in the national park, where lions, hyenas, leopards and elephants roam! And you get really close to some of them (ask our "girlie"-group, they had a very close encounter with about 80 elephants on the trot the other day!).

Community survey and GPS continue unabated and we completed 46 interviews with local farmers, mostly subsistence farmers, to get an idea of the main concerns. It seems that hyaenas are the biggest threat to livestock in the communal areas. Closer to the national park, lions also become a problem.

The study site's map is growing - all in all we have now mapped more than 280 km of roads and tracks, and many of these little villages along dusty and sandy track in the middle of the bush. In addition to our mapping work, we have also been busy with some road construction (removing trees and filling in holes), as elephants around camp are quite destructive. But we try to keep our access road to base camp clear!

I should mention that on Thursday, the last evening in camp, we had visitors around the campfire. Two "indunas" (induna: village elders) spoke about the history of Malengalenga, the area of our study site.

Now it is time to say a BIG THANK YOU to slot No1 of this year's Caprivi Expedition. So many things went a bit haywire, so much was achieved, and as you all know, this is an expedition after all ;) Thank you for your patience and efforts and always looking on the bright side of things.

Goodbye slot 1 and welcome slot 2.

23 September

The second team of this year's expedition arrived safely, some of them with their luggage delayed or (Rick) absent – all thanks to Jo'burg airport. If you can collect and check it in there manually, please do so as this will increase the chances of your luggage getting to Livingstone.

After two days of briefings and training on data collection techniques, completing data sheets, handling equipment and off road driving we started the research activities today. The GPS mapping team went out to continue searching for passable tracks. Today we covered more than 150 km, mainly in the thick mopane forest. Spending the day in the car looking for landmarks and infrastructure is quite a job, especially during the midday heat. But it's exciting to see the map getting more and more detailed!

Working on the spoor and game count transects last week, I created maps of the transects and uploaded them to the GPS. My idea was to make it easy for everybody to find the transects and staying on them whilst doing the research tasks. This works very well, but it needs somebody in the team to check the route in the GPS! If not, you will take a completely different route like our experts Amy, Mechelle and Andy! :-)

24 September

Temperatures are up to 40 centigrade now, so we went for a swim in the river to cool down during the lunch break. Hard expedition life!

Apart from repairing a broken water tower, we also managed to do some more research work today with two teams out to do more interviews in the villages and collect game data on foot and vehicle transects. Francois' night group managed to receive signals of our collared lion and leopard. And they got close to them, sighting a pride of three lions, they followed them for a while. This will be done more and more in the coming weeks to study the predators' ecology & behaviour. We want to find out what their movement patterns are, where they find prey, where they rest, etc. This can be done relatively easily with the telemetry equipment. After locating the animals' signal, we try to spot them in the bush and when they move, we follow. Sounds easy, doesn't it? But this can take up a few hours, because lions especially enjoy their lie-downs, which can last for hours...

27 September

It's our day off and I am using it to review all the GPS data we have collected in the last three weeks.

Also some clarifications: Firstly, during our day off we go to Lianshulu Lodge by the Kwando river. You'll drive there in the morning, spend some time at the pool or on the terrace and then join a boat ride along the Kwando river, which forms the border between Namibia and Botswana. You'll return in the evening for dinner at the research station. Secondly, you must bring with you a lunch box, because in the morning during breakfast you'll pack your lunch to take with you into the field. If you forget to bring a box, your lunch will be squashed inside your daypack.

But now back to letting you know what has been going on in the last few days. We spotted lots of game in the NP. Hippos, buffaloes, elephants, kudu, impala, wild cat and serval and, of course, our study animals. Francois and his groups have managed to spot them every day during this slot!

Julia was busy with interviews in the Wuparo conservancy. Sangwali is the biggest settlement there (you should be able to find Sangwali on a map) and it's remarkable how widely scattered over a large area this settlement is. Consisting of many small villages, this is a place of 25 x 25 km where perhaps between 4,000 and 6,000 people live.

Yesterday we all sat around the fire, having a braai (BBQ), watching the stars (explained by Serge) and went to bed quite late because of our day off today!

28 September

After yesterday's day off everybody is full of beans again and fit for new ventures, encouraged by our Biosphere Expeditions' presentation about all our projects yesterday evening. Today we went out to Chinchimane, a settlement about 60 km from base camp, to experiencing the festival of Chief Mamili's birthday celebration. Chief Mamili is the traditional chief of the area, the National Park is named after him, and thousands of people from all over the place were coming to join this event. After hours of dancing, singing, speeches about importance of history, culture and politics and a procession with the chief in leopard's coat, everybody was invited to His Majesty's lunch. What a rare experience of being in the middle of the crowd with traditional singing and dancing groups in traditional colourful costumes!

But after joining this event in the morning, we went back to research work in the afternoon. We tried to find a suitable route for the vehicle game count in the Wuparo conservancy, where no route has been set yet. But in the Mopane forest it's hard to finding a track, which does not end in one of the countless fields or cattle kraals. Finally we gave up shortly before sunset and made our way back to camp.

Good news from the carnivore team! Francois and his team found telemetry signals of the leopard very quickly. After spotting her, Francois realized a warthog kill is the reason for the leopard not moving. Also, the mother (not collared yet) showed up, but there was no possibility for a capture, because they disappeared into the bush too quickly.

29 September

Today I joined the Foot Sign Transect and Game Count group in the morning, which led us to the Shikhaku forest area. At 08:30 it was already very hot and took it out of us, but we managed to finish the 9 km transect. And it's incredible what you can find in the dense bush. Often you can't see more than 10 metres into the bush, and yet we found spoors of hyaena, genet, civet, jackal, kudu, duiker, aardvark, porcupine and wildcat. So there is a lot of wildlife around, most of the animals are nocturnal, so that makes it easy to identify the tracks in the morning.

In the afternoon I led the carnivore tracking team (Amy, Mechelle and Andy) together with our PMU guy John out into the Mamili NP. Our aim was firstly to cross a deep channel safely and successfully. We did and directly after that we tried out the telemetry equipment. Because of quite strong signals from both, the leopard and the collared lions we went into a hectic activity to complete triangulations of both animals. With the help of those triangulations we are able to locate the animals very accurately. After this was done (thanks to the team!) we wanted to spot the lions to continue studying their movements. Luckily, and thanks to eagle-eye John, we found them very quickly! Lying around very lazily and well fed their interest in a Land Rover approaching was very little. Even when we got closer (only 5 m from them) the only reaction was a roll on the back to stretch their legs!

So we decided to have our dinner, not even 500 m away (anyone chickening out? J) to be close for another attempt to follow them. Unfortunately they decided that their spot was a perfect one to spend the whole night there. So we went for the leopard, but this elusive cat proved invisible to us.

2 October

Good to see that our research activities are developing well. The second week went smoothly, each team did its best, with the first week's experience a useful guideline. We finished mapping the small villages in the Sangwali area. Some of them are only a few huts with one family and you will not find them on any map except ours!

No news on the elephants. They are still around, this morning they again blocked our access road (we cleared it yesterday!). Perhaps 300 of them were sneaking around J.

News on the predators: A local fisherman discovered a hyaena den, which we checked out, only to find that the den had not been used for a week, but we'll keep an eye on that.

In the morning we completed the Wuparo Conservancy Foot Transect, after a 5 km walk, just right to avoid the heat, we drove back to camp when we realized that somebody (?) forgot to put the GPS (with all the important data!!!) into the car. So we turned around, searching for the precious thing and suddenly we spotted something yellow in the dust just in the middle of the road. Luckily the traffic density in this area is not comparable to European highways. So all our data were safe, and I am happy! Phew!

3 October

In the early morning we made our way back to Katima Mulilo. Its surprising again and again how fast two weeks of each slot can pass by! We did achieve a lot, more routine in our daily work, more transects for spoor tracking and game count, more than 25 new interviews, so what can I say other than: A job well done slot two! Thank you!

Maybe one more word for clarification for upcoming slots: In Livingstone at the assembly point you'll be picked up by a shuttle bus, which bring you directly to us. We'll be waiting for you at 11:00 a.m. at the Zambian/Namibian border. This worked very well for the first two slots, just don't be surprised when a bus is showing up instead of a Land Rover!

13 October

No new diary from Peter yet, but we thought you might like to see a blog entry about a leopard capture from one of our team members at [http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/johnrawnsley/entry/spotted\\_game/](http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/johnrawnsley/entry/spotted_game/).

14 October

The team members set off this morning to begin data collection after a day of training and lectures yesterday.

I took the GPS mapping team to the Balyerwa conservancy close to Mudumu NP. With Makando's (one of our PMU's) support we set a transect for the Foot Sign and Game Count route in that area. After 6 km of walking it became really hot around 10:00 already and everybody was happy to reach the car again. On the way we could spot roan antelopes, zebra and a hyena track. Because of the proximity to the National Park, this area will be particularly interesting to study where and how the animals move between the conservancy and the National Park.

The "real" Foot Transect team beat us today, they walked 9 km in Shikhakhu and spotted two hyenas, possibly wild dog tracks and many, many tracks of wildcat.

We also tried to investigate lion tracks close to a village, which was reported by a local farmer. Despite walking around and searching intensively, we were not able to find them. Elephants are still around camp, which is quite unusual, as normally they move away after one or two days and come back after some more days. This time they remained here, which makes movements for game count or sign transects interesting or logistical support tricky sometimes and you need some patience. In the evening five big animals came very close to our fence. So we had our daily review with some audience.

In the night Francois and his team met another elephant, a massive bull, two metres from the car. But John obviously speaks the elephant language. He didn't tell what he said, but all of a sudden the bull took himself off into the bush. Eager to spot more in the bush all of them missed the leopard until she was about couple metres from the car. The mother of our collared young female just wanted to have a look who is disturbing her again ☺

15 October

In the morning Julia's community survey went out to Balyerwa again. There are so many villages that this will keep us busy for a while. Main results of this week's investigation are: We found a disco, playing Snoop Dog, and the local craft market where all the ladies of the expedition bought hundreds of hand-made baskets of all sizes. At least the locals are happy to sell the products and I am already laughing seeing our team members packing their bags with baskets. I wonder what will stay here instead! :-)

At noon fisherman and rangers reported a dead elephant and because everybody was keen to have a look, we went there in the afternoon. On our way John spotted another one, obviously just passed away. Francois and the rangers

tried to ascertain the cause of death, but no clear signs could be found. Two dead elephants in the area - that has to be reported to the Ministry and also to the conservancy for further investigation. We'll see what comes out of this.

In the last days we saw some clouds in the sky – shock, horror! And especially over midday it is incredibly hot now. The locals say the rain will come soon, which means that there will be some drops first and maybe some more drops after a few days, sometime with thunder.

17 October

Yesterday it happened! On our way to map the area around Mudumu NP approximately 10 rain drops fell onto our windscreen. In the distance we could hear some thunder, so now the “rainy” season has started!

Francois decided it was worth putting some effort into observing the dead elephant as it is likely to attract some carnivores, which could give us a good chance to capture one. So we went out with a team yesterday and today for observation. Unluckily nothing the first night. After three hours of sitting still and staring into the night, we were just about moving home, a movement could be spotted around the carcass. Bright moonlight, nightvision and binoculars couldn't do the job of identifying what it was, so eventually I took the spotlight to spot a domestic dog! Disappointed we drove home, just in time to sing a birthday song for Lynn at midnight!

In the afternoon the telemetry team found a third dead elephant in the area. Samples of these animals will go to the state veterinary for further analysis.

18 October

So a lot of work was done during the last week. On our transects we spotted many tracks, mainly hyaena (and of course many others, but interestingly for our data collection, there were only the five big predators). Unusually we found a hippo and a crocodile track on the transects. Animals of this week:

lots of baboons and elephants, hippos, bushbucks, kudu, duikers, roan and sable antelopes, impala, serval, leopard, springhare, mice, spiders, puff adder with baby, a scorpion, thousands of bird (e.g. cranes, storks, eagles, pelicans.....) and many more.

Everyone is enjoying a day off from data collection today and we are all now focussing on the next few days to bring us what everyone is hoping to see - a lion or a leopard or hyaena close enough for sedation!

20 October

Sunday morning yesterday. On our way out to more interviews and mapping we stopped at a cattle kraal for some private investigation of our agricultural experts from Switzerland. Irma and Ingo conducted an interview with the farmer and found out that a cow only produces 1 litre of milk per day. After this and also the community survey was done, we checked a lion track in muddy terrain, which was reported by a farmer. And, sure enough, it was a female lion track, two days old, disappearing into the thick bush.

Francois took one recce team into the Mudumu NP, meeting up with the rangers there to find out more about the lion population in that park. On their way with lots of game around, they found several lion tracks. So simply by having a closer look, we could solve the riddle of Mudumu. The three lodges around assumed that in the whole area there is only one big male lion around. Well, there are more! We have started a relationship with the rangers there now and we will put more effort into working in that area from now on.

Midnight, Philipp's 18th birthday. Francois checked, secretly, a bait close to camp. What was feeding there? A nice female leopard, waiting for her sedation shot! Once she was completely unconscious, we brought her to camp where the examination took place on the back of the pick-up after we woke everybody up! Weighing in at 33 kilos, this was a fully grown adult animal, so we fitted a radio collar on. The health checks and measurements took us about 45 minutes and after a few flickers from her ears Francois decided we should put her on the ground to wake up. This process took a lot longer than we expected but once awake, she disappeared immediately into the bush! Our third collared study animal! Slowly we can start doing telemetry the whole day!

In the mornings the sky is now covered with clouds, which makes the temperature more comfortable until the sun burns all the clouds away by noon. But this also means more humidity, more flies and mosquitoes.

Later today we got results from the Ministry for Environment and Tourism. At least the third elephant's cause of death is anthrax. Some other scientists and vets also reported cases of anthrax in Botswana and Caprivi. This is not unusual, especially during this time of the year. Anthrax is always present here, which always makes us being very cautious when carcasses are spotted.

One of our groups was incredibly lucky today, probably because it was Phillip's birthday and Adi's and Lysann's wedding anniversary. They spotted in one single afternoon: the collared leopard, warthog, baboons with eight little babies, puku, lechwe, impala, kudu, buffalo, jackal, springhare, and of course elephant and hippo, vultures, ground hornbills, cranes and a pangolin! What a day, ending with a birthday cake made by Ronel and a private candlelit dinner for two of us ;)

23 October

The data collection in the second week of a group is always running smoothly. Everybody knows how things work. Francois has at last found a crossing through the deep channel to Liandura island in the southern part of Mamili NP. A lot of effort was put into this because we think this is a good island for us with lots of game and lions! Now we can start investigating there. And first results show there must be some groups of lions on this island, we already found their tracks there.

The telemetry team is now able to find the collared lion with her cubs each day. They are obviously enjoying their lives, as each time we see them they are really relaxed, rolling on their back, etc. We also picked up signals of female leopard 2, collared on Sunday night (you remember?), very close to camp! But we couldn't spot her in the bush - she was hiding somewhere.

Of course, Francois' team got stuck in the mud somewhere again, but the reward for the hard work was spotting secretary birds, endangered, rare cranes, fish eagle, kingfisher, serval cats, a baby croc with its huge mum, a tortoise and all the others!

The GPS mapping team went into the Mudumu NP, where we discovered some more (new) roads that are not on the existing maps. One more reason why our mapping is important. It not only gives us all the data digitally, we can also correct the existing maps! This park is a completely different habitat compared to Mamili. Away from the river you'll find roan and sable antelopes and zebra. Also sightings of cheetahs have been reported to us in that area.

25 October

I am now in Livingstone where the amazing purple blooms of the jacaranda trees are still out in force. But there is almost no water at the Victoria Falls during this time of the year.

The third slot has come to an end. It has been another great two weeks with the fantastic bonus of a leopard capture and collaring. A big thank you to everyone for all your commitment and hard work with collecting data and for all the fun that went along with it. I hope you all take away some great memories.

So, tomorrow is the start of the fourth slot and I can't begin to imagine what surprises lie in store for us. Let's see!



27 October

After a long morning of training on the equipment and explaining the background of the project, we had closer look at the Land Rovers in the heat of the afternoon. Everybody learned how a winch works, how to use the high-lift jack and we made sure that the cars are ready for the next few days of fieldwork. Next I took the drivers out for a driving course to show them how to cross water and stuff. Francois organised some bait and placed it in two promising locations close to camp while Julia took the non-drivers out for a game drive. After a while Julia's emergency call came in! Stuck in the National Park! So the rescue team made their way to a shallow stream where the Land Rover was stuck in a sandy hole. So we put training into practice and everybody experienced how hard it can be to get a car out of the water. Of course it got dark, the mosquitoes came out and finally we had to call Francois to help with the rescue operation. With two cars and after three ours of digging, jacking, pushing, towing, we finally managed to get the car out. Call it training on the job!

30 October

On their second full day of on-site activities, slot four is in the swing of data collection work with promising results so far. Francois took out some of the team to check the baits and with the aid of telemetry they spotted "our" female leopard just lying and resting in a tree! They also received signals from the the pride of lions (female lion 1, FLI1), but they were far away. Unfortunately nothing to report on the baits, "only" vultures and jackals took an interest.

More carnivore spoors were discovered on the Wuparo Foot Transect such as a cheetah and a hyaena track. And the Vehicle Game Count team reported sightings of two single buffaloes outside the NP and a big herd of buffaloes inside. Elephants, of course, are always around and we counted hippos, warthogs, kudu, duiker, reedbuck and the big troop of baboons is very often on the same spot.

Today we tried to conduct two Foot Transects (in Dzoti Conservancy and Mamili NP) at the same time with two teams to get a better idea of animal movements. That worked well, we found two lion tracks, a leopard and a hyaena track and, again, elephants all around!

2 November

For quite a while now we have been very busy in the Balyerwa Conservancy. This seems to be an incredibly big place with lots of villages, some very small, just a few huts. So GPS mapping and the Community Survey also are still busy in that area.

Just to give to you an idea, altogether, we have now mapped more than 600 km of road network, over 60 villages and 600 other waypoints so far!

During the interviews we learned that some people are really interested in conservation and our project and want to support us whichever way they can. Others, often older ones, take a negative view of it. The variety of persons questioned goes from 17-year old girls to old men of more than 80. Especially now in the beginning of the rainy season, many people are out on the fields, so there are not many left in the villages during the day. Sometimes you'll come across tragic stories such as a house burnt down or somebody losing cattle and therefore their livelihoods through disease.

We are obviously not the only ones visiting the villages. In one village people were really hostile. The reason for that, we found out, was an approach by a sect in that village, a sect that is hostile to whites.

On Friday afternoon we completed the first four-day cycle of activities. We also conducted two Vehicle Game Counts at the same time this week in the neighbouring areas of Balyerwa and Mudumu. Not many animals around but that's the way of nature sometimes.

So while I am sitting here, raindrops are falling on my hut and I can hear thunder not too far away. Francois was heading out yesterday night with a team, because during yesterday's day off, Lianshulu Lodge staff was reporting lions close by, whiche we were keen to find. So we tried something new: Francois will stay in that area with a tent and the teams are shifting, supporting him during the night to search for these lions. We all hope this effort with be crowned by success.

One word about road construction. You'll remember that team 1 and 2 were quite busy with keeping the access road to base camp passable, because of our big grey friends. Some weeks ago this road was closed by some farmers who were ploughing their fields, so in the interest of good community relations we now have to use another road from the main road to Hanyini Research Station.

8 November

Due to some car breakdowns we had to improvise a little bit during the last week. More effort was put into activities on foot or we organized to drop the teams somewhere and collect them after finishing the work, which worked very well, I think.

On foot in the different areas (Conservancies and National Parks, different vegetation forms and habitats) we found six hyaena tracks and eight leopard tracks in total - amongst them FLE2, our second collared female leopard with the cub. Sometimes we took the telemetry equipment with us to get an idea where our study animals were roaming around.

The vehicle game count teams saw and counted quite a lot of game and I am already eager to see the analysis of these counts on one of my maps. Of course, this will take a while after the expedition, but we'll let you know ;-).

Our lions chase was unfortunately not successful. I think nobody knows the south-western part of the Mudumu National Park better than Francois now. I was really worried about him when I saw him sunburnt, walking the whole day in one direction following the lion's track. After four days we gave up! But we'll get them! Driving through the bush in the middle of the night was an experience for everybody. No cats, but chameleons in the tree, snakes, scorpions and spiders around the fire in the bush (always attacking Kristina). Not really our main study, but exciting!

Our community survey now reaches remote villages, altogether we did more than 20 interviews in this slot. Our mapping is almost finished, just one more day, then I have to work on the computer to put everything together. I look forward to seeing the result of our work from the last weeks printed on a poster.

Wednesday, our last night out, Francois took the whole group to find/spot FLE2. We found her signal quickly, but leopards are smart and excellent at hiding. Hans holding the spotlight could see her first, then racing away at incredible speed she disappeared into the bush and was not seen again! But at least some of the team could spot her moving like lighting.

And again - unbelievable how fast it goes - one more slot of the 2008 Caprivi expedition is over. Thanks for the enthusiasm and effort you put in, collecting data for the project, folks! And tomorrow the last team for this year will arrive. We're looking forward meeting all of you!

12 November

So, finally the last team of the expedition arrived safely on Sunday. Only one bag is still lost and on the way from Livingstone there was a two hours stop because of a flat tyre on the shuttle. As I told you, this is an expedition ;)

After the introductions late on Sunday we continued on Monday with talks about the science, training on the equipment and Land Rovers, as usual. All this and more is recorded by a film crew from German VOX TV, which is with us for a week.

Yesterday morning was the first time we let the team members out for real data collection :) One team went to Wuparo to walk the Sign Transect and Foot Game Count. The sky was heavily overcast, so not much was seen, probably the animals got wind of the coming rain and were hiding. Julia is still busy in Balyerwa doing interviews for the Community Survey.

Believe it or not, at around 12:00 we had a heavy downpour, probably (according to Francois and Julia) the heaviest ever in early November! Oh man, it was raining for two hours and we had a lot of work with waterproofing kitchen, huts, tents etc. We had to use all buckets and bowls in camp to keep the water out. The temperature dropped down below 20 C and the sky was dark! Luckily, the day before we had set up a big tent next to the kitchen, which is waterproof.

After that Francois and I decided to capture a lion today in the afternoon!

So Francois went out with team 1 and the film crew, equipped with telemetry and capture gear to find FLI1, the collared female lion mother (with the two male and female sub-adults). We wanted to collar the young male, because he's moving away now from time to time and at some stage the time will come from him to part from his family. After only an hour Francois informed me on the phone that they had found the lions. So everybody rushed into the car and we drove quickly after them! After half an hour's drive through the wet and muddy Mamili NP and two water crossings and one scary metal bridge later, we reached Francois and team waiting for us, just a couple hundred of metres away from the lions.

The darting procedure took a while. We could spot all three lions in the reeds at a kill of a sitatunga bull. The high grass next to water made it difficult to hit the target, but finally Francois did it! Then we had to chase away the other two with the Land Rovers, which worked very well. So we loaded MLI1 (Male Lion 1) on the trailer to move him away from the other lions around. Six people were needed to lift that guy and after we fitted the collar on, Francois started with the examination. He was taking body measurements and investigating physical condition and health of the animal. After a while he (the lion) moved his head and some rumbling came out of the depth of his throat, so we decided to leave him alone. It took more than three hours for him to wake up and then he just watched us not even thinking about moving away. We, sitting in and on the cars had to watch him until he was fully awake to check if everything was fine with him. Obviously it was, so we headed back to camp in the late evening for a midnight dinner and some lion capture celebration.

What a day!

So today, everybody is back to normal work after a short night. The two Foot Transect groups just came back from Dzoti and Mamili. Not really much to report because of more rain in the morning (still chilly and no sun!), one group saw 16 buffaloes and a reedbuck, the other ones also spotted buffaloes and a night adder in the park!

In the afternoon we will go out to have a telemetry look, whether MLI1 is back to mummy and maybe we'll find one of the leopards...

14 November

Highlights from yesterday were different sightings of e.g. side-striped jackal, hippo outside the pool during the day and a big herd of buffaloes. In the morning the telemetry team spotted FLE1 close to the T-junction behind the deep water crossing! Cool, they were sooo close, Kurt took great pictures with his mega lens! Leopard sitting in the tree, watching us! Just incredible that we could spot her. And also the lions and some signals, moving somewhere in the bush, we couldn't spot them.

Day off is close (tomorrow), so Barry decided to teach us Irish dancing to honour his birthday today, of course after our daily work. So after a marvellous apple pie, baked by Ronel on the fire, he convinced a few to join the lesson. Very funny, watching people with head torches around the ankles trying to follow Irish dance steps. Julia topped the show with a nice reed skirt, bought in a village!

During the day we were busy with the film crew in Katima Mulilo, filming Sara in the big city. They're following Sara wherever she goes ;-), to show on German TV what expedition life is like.

Camera man Florian stepped into something which cut the sole of his foot yesterday. Because there was not the right equipment in the Sangwali Health Centre, we took him back to the station, where Uli and Francois did a very good job at stitching that cut. Just to make sure, we went to see a doctor today. I tried to get some crutches for him so that he can move around. Imagine how difficult that can be in Katima. After two hours, talking to several doctors, chatting to a very bored physiotherapist at the state hospital from Cuba for half an hour, I got them! Yeah!

The remaining researchers tried to get more information about our collared lions and they spotted them after following the telemetry signals. Lazily, as always, they hung around very close to the spot where we found them when we collared MLI1 on Tuesday night. Temperatures drop down to chilly when the sky is overcast, but as soon as the sun comes out, it's really hot and humid. But with cloud cover, the sunset is even more beautiful and stunning. During the day the cicadas make an incredible noise, sometimes you only realize it when they stop, because you can't hear any more.

17 November

After they have seen what the daily problems are here in this region, the group decided to collect some money for a "Florian needle and crutches fund" to support the Sangwali Health Centre for more medical equipment, isn't that great?

GPS mapping came to an end, Julia and her group went into the last unmapped villages. Now I only have to add some more locations of predator sightings, then the digital map, the beginning of an information system for this project is done.

During the morning Francois went out to check on the lions, and found them still in the same spot! On the way back, he saw three more lions and first he thought, they moved really fast. Back at base we were convinced that must have been a different group of lions. Very often the farmers of the villages close by report sightings, tracks and kills. And also very often we can hear lions roaring close to camp. Francois knows this group already, but every time he wanted to follow them, they disappear very very fast. So we went out to check on their location, but, guess what, we couldn't find them!

So Francois decided to try to find them in the afternoon and night. And, really, they could find their tracks. After darkness, the team had to drive in the marsh, very wet in the high grass where you can't see more than a metre. Sitting on the roof rack, shining with the 800,000 candles spotlight, James, Ina, Uli, Sara and Kurt tried to find them. Bumping with the front and rear wheel in two holes of an aardvark at the same time is already bad luck. But if you have a loaded dart gun in your hand to dart one of the lions you've searched for hours driving around like crazy, and you are only few metres away from them and then to get stuck, what do you call this? Francois, almost prepared to shoot, could have kicked himself!!! So the lions got away completely relaxed and our team watched them from the roof, stuck in the hole. It took two hours for them to get out! You can imagine what mood they returned in...

19 November

More luck on Tuesday! No immobilisation, but Francois took the Monitoring group and his parents out into the bush and, very close to camp they spotted FLE2 and her cub, just sitting in the grass! Quick decision to have a look where they are going after our dinner. So the group went back to the station and then another heavy downpour and thunder, which was quite something, stopped all late afternoon and evening activities. So we had to sit in the shelter of the big tent or in the kitchen playing cards or collecting water.

Today the last full day of data collection has come! So, all groups went out another time doing the different research activities. Nothing very exciting to report on the Wuparo Foot Transect, except the mopane forest gets green and lush after all the rain. Quite nice to see!

One other group walked into the National Park to have a look for the buffaloes which we could hear all night long. They have been really close to camp, some even touched the fence, ringing the bells! Lots of buffalo tracks around, but no sings of lions. Very often the big cats follow their favourite dish, but not today.

While I am busy with wrapping up the last 12 weeks of field work the team are out for the afternoon. Very importantly, as this is your legacy, the data entry went well. Francois told me the other day that he can't wait to get going on the expedition report. The analysis of all data you collected will keep Julia and Francois busy for a while. We will let you know when the report will be published.

The Vehicle Game Count team just came back, having spotted many buffaloes around camp. So some weeks ago, the elephants besieged the Hanyini Research Station, now it's the buffaloes! And no less important, that team also collected tomorrow's dinner from the fishermen at the river. One last time fresh river bream from Caprivi!

21 November

Incredibly, this is already the last entry of the 2008 Caprivi diary! I remember coming here in August and now it's almost the end of November. Time flew by and I met so many interesting people from all over the world and all of you did a great job contributing to this new project.

I remember that in the first days we had to fight with new activities and get everything into a groove. Then there were the elephants trapping us many times along the road, we had to work a lot on that road! Remember the collapsed water tower? Very interesting to see how we progressed doing interviews in all four conservancies. We met so many local people, meetings which are very special and, I am sure, many of you will never forget.

We chased lions and leopards all night long. Finally we now have four collared study animals. Many of you learned, how to get a car out of the water, mud, holes, reeds....etc!

We mapped a largely unmapped site and we now have a road/track network of more than 400 km, more than 80 villages and 220 cattle kraals.

Whilst working in and around study site we spotted so much (remember the "ghost transect"?). I really look forward to seeing it all written up in Julia's and Francois' report. And I look forward to seeing the station next year again - imagine what it will look like with grass growing.

So what else can I say? Thanks to everybody for your contribution, patience, effort and flexibility. A special thanks goes to Julia, Francois and their staff.

Hope to see you again, maybe on next year's Caprivi expedition or somewhere else!

So long - it's been great working with you.

Peter Schuette  
Expedition leader

P.S.: And don't forget to upload and share your pictures via [www.biosphere-expeditions.org/pictureshare](http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org/pictureshare).

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Addendum from Julia & Francois

This year marks the beginning of the Caprivi Human-Predator Conflict (HPC) Project and by your efforts and funds, what a start it has been! During this expedition each team has contributed to research activities that have been identified by the projects' academic and field supervisors as being relevant to addressing HPC in the Caprivi, and elsewhere in Africa, for the mutual benefit of rural people and wildlife alike. As you will have realised, this applied-research project takes on a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to a pressing conservation issue by embodying numerous crosscutting activities. You will remember these activities well and in summary, this year's expedition has collected the data necessary to complete a detailed Geographical Information System (GIS) map for the study site and the community survey for preliminary situation analysis.

As you know, all other activities are ongoing and the ones completed this year serve as stepping-stones to attain further goalposts in 2009. Please look out for the complete expedition report within six to twelve months, which will give a detailed scientific explanation of the data collected this year.

Our study animals, FLE1, FLE2, FLI1 and MLI1 are all doing well and have not found themselves in need of rescuing as yet. We have much to learn from these study individuals and look forward to what data they will produce. FLE1, the two cubs of FLE2 and MLI1 are all in the process of becoming independent and will disperse soon. It is these transient animals that will be keeping us on our toes.

The communities of the Mudumu South Complex (MSC) have had their first experience of integrating with and working together with team members at the grass roots level. Their responses of the expedition this year are in accordance with, "we ourselves did learn so much", and "why can't we work together the whole year?" They will miss you and are deeply grateful for your support.

Life at the station continues unabated and together with the MSC Predator Monitoring Unit (PMU) the project's scientists will usher in the new year with more research data, community work, capture and monitoring. The PMU themselves have grown noticeably this year in their fieldwork with you and they too look forward to the expedition in 2009.

Each research team has been so different and you will each remember the personalities of your fellow team members. We would like to thank each of you for your specific contributions and insights and we will certainly never forget the events that have transpired over the past ten weeks. Despite sunken vehicles, camera crews with home-done stitches, hundreds of tyre punctures, stuck countless times, broken windows and extremely long nights in tow, the 2008 expedition to this wild junction of Africa was without a doubt a huge success and by its very nature lived by its motto, 'EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED!'

From your scientists in the field we extend a hearty thank you for this year and we hope to see you again soon.

Francois de Wet (B.Sc. Hons. Ecol.) & Julia Gaedke (M.A. Comm. Econ.)