

Elephant Re-collaring's

Feb has been a busy month for the STE-SA team, with two big re-collaring's happening on the 3rd of Feb, and then again on the 16th. Let me start at the end by saying that each day was very successful and we managed to find and re-collar 6 elephants in total, which is great! I also want to take this opportunity to thank Johan Steenkamp and Louis Van Wyk from Wildlifevets.com for their great work on the collaring, as well as their steady smiles, continual support, and compassionate manner to the elephants and our guests on the collaring – as they not only darted, worked on the elephants, and made sure that everything ran smoothly, but also explained their work patiently to us non-medically minded people, and let us get involved, which was special!



I would also like to say “thanks” to Benjamin Osmers, the pilot from Big Game Heli for his involvement in making everything work.. Needless to say, without his steady hand at the wheel (or whatever it is that choppers have) and his quick work at spotting elephants and herding them towards the road – things would not have gone as smoothly for us. So Ben, for all your time- thank you!



Then of course, as you can imagine collaring such as these come with quite a few costs... and costs that end with lots of zero's – so to help us cover these, we have had a couple guests and corporate groups not only sponsor the collars themselves, but also assist us with covering the costs of the Re-Collaring operation, such as pilots, vets, warden fees, field guards, petrol, etc.

At the first collaring – where we re-collared Yvonne, Gower and Tussle, we have a few people to thank. Irving Tucker and his group kindly sponsored a collar for Yvonne, a beautiful elephant cow in the Grasses herd, who was named in honour of Yvonne Tucker, who sadly passed away. She was first fitted with a collar years back when we had to dart her to remove a snare that was found around her foot – and we have been watching this gentle lady growing up ever since.



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Gower is a powerful bull elephant of over 35 years, and between 5 and 6 tons. Now that's one big ellie. His collaring was truly amazing to see – especially when you compared it to Yvonne. His size truly just blows one away! To lie against his huge belly and feel his chest rise and fall was one of the most touching opportunities that a guest will ever get to experience.



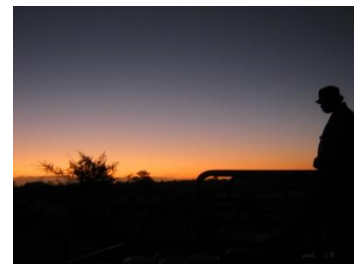
By the time we managed to finish Gower we were all hot and very sweaty as the lovely morning had progressed into a VERY hot African day – and the elephants were taking longer to find than we had planned. So with sunburnt noses and dry throats we headed off to find Tussle, our third elephant for the day. We had initially planned to collar a big bull called Barry, but Ben and Michelle searching from the air decided that he was nowhere to be found – so we had to realign our sights, reset our plans, and start the search for Tussle, a younger cheekier bull in his early 20's.

It was with jubilant smiles that we watched Tussle get up in the road, looking very majestic with his new collar on. Craig Spencer, and a group of his students from Balule, had spent the day with us, helping us cover costs, and getting grubby to assist us where needed, heaving elephants feet here and there, and helping take measurements. It was a very happy but tired group that bade the vets and pilot farewell – as we then made our way back to Tanda Tula camp, who had kindly set out a nice lunch for us. There is something about waking up at 4 am... working hard in the sun all day, being surrounded by good people, and feeling dusty and dirty that really works up a good appetite – so with plates piled high and laughter ringing, the first re-collaring day was coined a success!



The evening of the 15th saw all of us being very zen as we had a nice braai and prepared ourselves mentally for the day of re-collaring that was to come. With the vets only arriving late that evening from some work they had to do en-route, none of us had a very early night – so it was with bleary eyed wonder that we struggled out of bed at 03h45 to be out the door and into the landy at 4h15...

and yes you are correct in surmising that the sun is most definitely not even up then...



But with Ben Osmer's landing his chopper on the airstrip at first light, and adrenalin kicking in – the collaring was officially underway. Proud, a magnificent bull with just as magnificent tusks was our first elephant to find. And seeing him one realises that he really does have something to be proud of! Wow. His collaring went fairly quickly as he had fallen in a slightly uncomfortable position and the vets, Johan and Louis, ever aware of the elephants comfort were quick to finish their work and get Proud up and on his feet again as quickly as possible. Just stroking the super soft spot behind his ears was such an amazing feeling – such a giant, but with such softness! Bruce Jenkins, and his group, who kindly sponsored Proud's collar got to get involved and help with measurements, and I think they really all enjoyed getting to feel Proud's leathery skin, and hear his rumbling snores!



With the day running considerably quicker than the last collaring, and the sun only starting to warm the air we bounced off in the landrover to find Classic, our second elephant. Nelda Villines, a wonderful American woman, had sponsored his new collar – so it was with great excitement that she got the opportunity to hop in the chopper with Ben. Classic is one of the most well "classic" looking bulls, so named for his amazing curving tusks which were so signature. Unfortunately with all his travels over the grasslands and mopane forests of this area, he has managed to break his right tusk – which is sad, but this does not make him look any less imposing! Classic was amazing to watch rise as he swung his body back and forth to gain momentum to raise his bulk, and eventually used a tree to help him get up. Quite surreal to watch such a big animal using nature's support!



With lack of sleep threatening to catch up – we set off towards a new area of the reserve to try to find Lapajuma’s herd. She is the most sweet beautiful elephant – and yes, here I might be biased. Ben managed to get her to fall in an open field which made work quite quick and easy for Michelle, the vets, and Chris Pearson’s group – who were assisting us with the collaring costs. I got to enjoy watching the scurry of work go on with a camera glued to my eye – and before I knew it the



reversal drug was being administered in her ear...and she was gently swaying her way back onto her feet again, with smiles and the feeling of success sinking over the group. As she wandered off into the trees to rejoin her herd, we boarded our vehicles and headed towards yet another scrumptious lunch, and some celebratory G & T’s, which we had on the deck overlooking the beautiful dry riverbed at Tanda Tula.

Another wonderful very successful day of re-collaring. To all the elephants; you look beautiful with your new collars, and we hope you provide us with some very successful data. To all the helpers and sponsors – we couldn’t have done it without you. And to the powers that be for allowing us great weather, sunshine, success at finding the elephants and two beautiful days with great people....we are very grateful!

Happiness is the real sense of fulfilment that comes from hard work. - Joseph Barbara

Work is love made visible - Kahlil Gibran