

My name is Colin Addis and I came to STE-SA in May with the intention of staying for a month to gain field work experience. I am a doctoral student in Ecology from the University of Texas at Austin, but my background was a purely a theoretical and mathematical one and I wanted to get involved with a project in the field. I have found this experience to be invaluable, teaching me more than I even set out to learn. When the day came to leave, I couldn't even get on the plane, deciding instead to stay for over two months.

I spent almost every day of the first month accompanying Prince, the STE field assistant, on his field surveys of the elephants in Timbavati, Umbabat and Klaserie Private Nature Reserves. In the morning we downloaded the most recent coordinates of the elephants with telemetry collars and drove out to find them and observe their behaviour. In the meantime, we often stumbled upon uncollared bulls or herds of elephants and recorded their locations along with pictures of their unique ears for identification. This was sometimes tedious work, with no sightings for hours at a time, but it was rewarding work as well. Elephants are magnificent creatures and every sighting was its own experience.

Additionally, I was lucky enough to participate in a collaring operation only two days before I left. STE had been hoping to re-collar Barry since before I arrived, but he had become difficult to find. When he appeared in mid June, we followed him for 12 hours until he gave us the slip at 3 AM. When he reappeared on July 4th, despite his escaping our all-night watch yet again, we relocated him the next morning for a smooth collaring. The elephants rarely fit conveniently into our schedules, but in this case, everything seemed to fall in place just in time for me to gain some valuable experience.

I experienced so much more here, however, than just field work. During my stay I was also fortunate enough to begin collaborating with Dr. Michelle Henley here at STE-SA on some of her current projects. With my background in programming and statistics, I spent most of my second month in the office helping to analyze data. I was glad to be able to contribute to this project and we hope to publish our work this fall. I also got a chance to lend a hand with STE-SA's various other projects including the Bush School, which brought young girls from local communities to the bush to learn about the nature right here on their doorstep that they rarely get a chance to see.

Also the staff were kind enough to invite me to travel Southern Africa with them during their time off, visiting several townships, attending a concert and a rugby game in Johannesburg, and enjoying the beaches of Mozambique.

For me, this trip was a step forward in my career as a scientist, but as an avid traveller, it was also just a tremendously exciting experience. Living in the unfenced camp here in among the wildlife was unforgettable. I found myself becoming attached to the family of Banded Mongoose that moved through each day, the giant porcupine that lived nearby, and the pair of whip scorpions that

lived behind my toilet. I found myself enjoying the calls of nearby hyenas at night, and stumbling across giraffe on evening walks. I found myself planning my jogging routes around the movements of our resident pride of lions, and watching carefully for buffalo when walking to the kitchen for a night time snack. There is an excitement that the constant presence of wildlife injects into everyday life here that makes the bush an intoxicating place and one that is hard to leave. I hope to be back someday soon.

