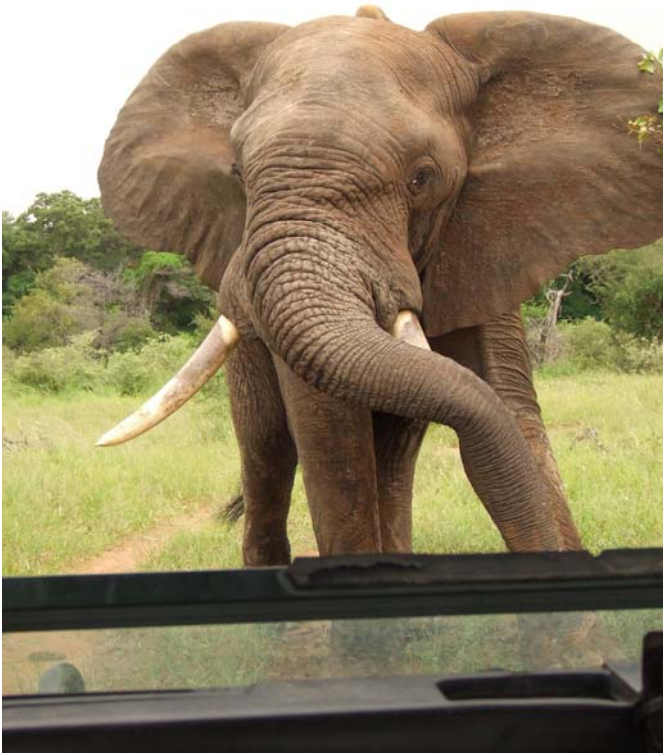


“Night and Day”- Re-collaring Barry 5th July 2011



Sometimes it feels adventure is just a glamorous term for “very hard work”...But either way, Barry’s re-collaring certainly was both. Barry is a beautiful bull elephant of about 30- 35 years old, and an elephant for whom I have a certain “soft spot” or “crush” if you will. I first saw him in musth in January, majestically walking through a breeding herd, with the young males moving reverently out his way. There is just something about the way Barry carries himself that speaks of power, of peace, of certainty. His long thick tusks bode that he lives with courage and strength.

With Barry’s VHF (very high frequency signal that we use to assist us in tracking our collared elephants) not working, it was imperative that we replace his collar... something we had been hoping to do since February. But—Barry is a clever and elusive boy and it’s only recently that we have started having sightings of him again. So- when Barry came out about two days ago—it was a siren’s call, a virtual trumpet of “Battle Stations!”... And; like is always said in books and movies, team spirit and resilience does come through in times like these. (As the STE-SA team will remember from our last all night vigil in June)

We decide that the only way to keep track of Barry till morning, when the vets would come, was to stay with him... all night. And so- our all night vigil began again, with Michelle and Ganesh happily taking first shift and watching as Barry spent some time feeding with a breeding herd, drinking at Marco’s dam and strolling into thicker bush as the sun set... And this, as you can imagine, is when the fun begins. Now one would think that it’s easy enough to keep tabs on something as enormous as an elephant, but – let me correct that misconception right now. Once they happily bumble off the road and into the thick bush they gain advantage 1.) we cant follow them... then of course, with the night being dark, and it being new moon comes advantage 2) we cant see them! Ha- exactly... not as easy as you thought right.

Anyway, Colin, Jess, and I headed out around 9pm to take over the second shift of watching Barry... Wrapped up nice and warm against the cold winter air we headed to Barry’s GPS coordinates, to relieve Michelle—who could now rest her ears and head home for a late dinner. Armed with a flask of tea, and ginger snap biscuits we sat in silence listening to Barry’s stomach grumbles rumbling through the night air. Silence, when it fell, was scary. We would sit- the cold and quiet wrapping around us like a blanket... waiting...straining for the sound of an ear flapping, the sound of a breaking branch...

A night in the bush, for those of you who have spent time here, is not a quiet thing... While Barry may have been silently napping, the rest of the nocturnal world- it seemed- was not. We heard lions, jackal, and hyena all raising their voices into the night. By 2am,

we knew that Barry was in the deepest part of the block- his noises barely audible and decided to call it a night... planning to head out early again to relocate him before the chopper and vets arrived.

After a too short, but refreshing couple hours of sleep, we were all up loading the car, grabbing GPS's, camera's and jackets and hopping into the "landie" (our rusty trusty land rover!) The collaring operation ran very smoothly and easily as we dropped Mish at the airstrip to meet up with Benjamin Osmers (the pilot) and Cobus Raath (an amazing wildlife vet). In the meantime the rest of the "crew" (including Almero Bosch, the local ecologist, and a few of his volunteers and field rangers) headed off to Barry's GPS coordinates in time to find him and get in position before he was darted.



By 8h30 we had visual of the chopper, we



could hear Barry munching in the bush, and we were all ready. It was- as usual- a very special experience. In fact, I find it a blessing to even be able to say "as usual" about something that is so "unusual"...and is an experience that very few people ever get to have. To lie on Barry's rumbling belly—hear his loud snores, and gently muffled breath, to look at the myriad of

cracks on the feet of this giant---and realise just how small we are, and how much we are tied into a tapestry in life of something so much grander.

Tony McClellan, a long-standing supporter of STE-SA, who has just been out for a visit to our research camp in the Timbavati Game Reserve, sponsored Barry's new collar. Thank you Tony! His collar went on with very little fuss, and after taking measurements, and photos, we were done—allowing Ronnie to assist the vet in administering the reversal drug which would wake Barry.

This was for Ronnie- a magical experience. Ronnie is a 15 year old boy that grew up in the local rural village of Acornhoek—with a heart and passion for elephants and conservation that would rock your socks off. Every holiday that Ronnie gets, he comes to help, with office admin, with tracking, with studying elephants...anything he can get his hands on... and now, with seeing, touching and feeling Barry—we've given Ronnie an experience that he will treasure forever.



Sitting back in the land rover, watching the chopper rise over the horizon, and Barry wave his trunk, weave his huge body, and with a sway, gently rise... eyeing us with his big doe-eyes, and then saunter off into the nearby Mopani bushes. (Where we had sat watching him all of last night.) So a long night and day with Barry, but a feeling of triumph as our hard work, team resilience and sense of adventure and passion paid off. Time now to head back to camp for a slap up brekkie... Think we deserve a reward for another collaring well done!