

Day in the field 23 May 2011

One of the definite perks of the jobs is those odd days, when we all wake up nice and early, have coffee, download the GPs coordinates and set off into the “field” (or beautiful wild African bush.) to all have a field day together. My job is mainly office based, (and something ill still give you more info about!! Because it’s pretty damn unique!) So it’s always nice to escape and remember the amazingness of living in one of the biggest reserves in the world, the Greater Kruger National Park... Driving out, dew spotting the grass, cool winter sunshine - Collin and Summer (our volunteers at Save the Elephants,) Michelle, Jess, Prince and myself set off. The morning was alive in the bush. Herds of impala looking happy (well-that’s how I imagine a happy impala should look!) and healthy because of our great late rains. (It’s very unusual to get rains here as late as May, so the bush is looking green and kind!) We saw a journey of giraffe stretching their necks into the tall trees, a family of waterbuck looking adorable with their little heart shaped noses and white rings on their bums. And then after a little bit of tracking and some listening for breaking branches--- we bumped into what we had been looking for. A herd of elephants!! Well – 2 to be precise! It was an amazing sighting that had been reported to us earlier, 2 herds converging to be over 100 elephants in a single sighting. It was truly amazing. Bumping into them we watched them cross the road. A literal wall of elephant bodies, rambunctious teenage boys flapping their ears and trumpeting, tiny still fluffy babies running clumsily between their mothers’s feet, powerful stately big bulls trailing the “family”. With Prince, Michelle and myself, developing a shutter-finger-syndrome, we clicked away trying to capture, not only the moment, but as many photographs of the individuals as we could--- photos which (part of my job!) we later use to see which individuals associate with which, amongst the elephants. Sort of like trying to work out an elephant bush-soap opera. We managed to see them a couple times as they crossed the road... clearly missioning somewhere...and then- tada... It hit us... water! ☺ We realised there is a lovely river not too far off- that has been dammed up and is at this stage full of fresh water. (thanks again to our lovely rains!) We pulled up alongside, and patiently waited, and it was only a few minutes later that the first members of the herd came rumbling and crashing through the bush. Literally 10’s of elephants before our eyes, milling around the vehicle, going down to the river to drink. One of the elephants made good use of the embankment by kicking up some nice dust, and then lying down..enjoying the warmth of the earth, and the fact that the slope would be helpful in getting his bulk up again! 3 elephants decided to go the whole hog and headed in for a “swim”. Completely immersing themselves in the water.. only their trunks visible like little elephant snorkels. It was a great sight, and a great way to spend the morning.. a reminder of why we are researching and conserving elephants, a reminder that despite everything we live in one of the most beautiful places on earth!! Hey- what can I say.. It’s not everyday—don’t get me wrong; but lucky me!!