

BOOM IN THE BUSHVELD: LIMPOPO FIELD TRIP

THEN KOLOKOLO BIRD SAID, WITH A MOURNFUL CRY: "GO TO THE BANKS OF THE GREAT GREY-GREEN, GREASY LIMPOPO RIVER, ALL SET ABOUT WITH FEVER-TREES, AND FIND OUT."

(RUDYARD KIPLING)

It is on the banks of this river in the far corners of the Limpopo Province of South Africa that a journey is underway to find out. Much has changed since Rudyard Kipling's short story 'The Elephant Child'. Man arrived to farm crops and cattle, the land has been tamed and the elephant and lion are gone. But nature survives... the mopane trees still attract the mopane worms that feast on the flush of growth after the rains, large birds of prey are returning and perhaps the boom of the Southern Ground Hornbill will be heard more often.

The people that live here are as extraordinary, tough and rugged as the land they live on. Mother Nature can be unmerciful but one thing still binds all the people that live and farm here, they feel the spirit and soul of their land. It is here that the Mabula Ground Hornbill Project has been working for the last two years with these farmers, to provide artificial nests to encourage more Ground Hornbills to breed. The Ground Hornbill's range has been greatly reduced and one of the reasons being the lack of suitable nesting trees. These birds need huge trees with suitably large cavities in order to breed. Most of these trees in the Limpopo Province have been chopped down.

An Education and Awareness Campaign has been initiated with the farmers in the Limpopo Province and groups of Ground Hornbills identified. Farmers help by sexing and monitoring groups by using identification kits supplied by the Project and reporting their findings. Suitable farms have also been identified where artificial nests will be erected. A hundred of these nests are being built with the help of SANPARKS and Echo Solutions. A goal has been set to erect nests along the whole Limpopo River from Musina to Olifantsdrift where the Crocodile flows into the Marico forming the great Limpopo River. Various other areas will also be targeted further inland such as the areas surrounding Alldays and areas west of Musina to gradually facilitate the expansion and growth of the population in the Limpopo Province. In July, thirty will be erected west of Musina.

This could be the start of a shift in people's attitudes with the local community's passion about making a difference, and we believe they will. Without the enthusiasm of these people the future of this amazing bird will never be secured. The responsibility lies on their shoulders and with the advice and help of the Mabula Ground Hornbill Project the charismatic Ground Hornbill will not become another memory lost to man's greed.

The Mabula Ground Hornbill Project

May, 2006