

MbeliMail

The Mbeli Bai Study (MBS) Newsletter



Bai News

A Sitatunga is Born in the bai!



Here at Mbeli Bai researchers are always seeing nature at its best (and also its worst!), from gorillas displaying to each other, to elephants chasing buffaloes, and from crocodiles eating otters to injuries inflicted on animals by their predators. But the one thing that has never been witnessed, that is until the 19th March 2015, is the birth of a wild animal. It was in the morning, around 8.30am of the 19th when Davy first spotted and photographed what appeared to be hooves sticking out of Sake's, a female sitatunga's, rear end.



This was exciting enough news, but it also appeared that she was going to stay in the bai to have it, a first for Mbeli. Luckily for us, It was a quiet period for the bai and we were not distracted by other things going on. There was only one other sitatunga in at the time and she had settled down to rest. So for the next 2 hours and 20 minutes we both kept a vigil eye on Sake and her progress, making sure that at least one of us had an eye on a telescope at any given time. We would get excited at the slightest peek of a hoof and then it would pop back inside, despite our best efforts of encouragement! Then as we were looking through the telescope we suddenly viewed another rear end. Cassis, a young male sitatunga, had crept into my field of view and was sideling up to Sake. He stayed with her for a while, grooming her and being groomed by her. we don't know if this was some sort of stimulation for her and if he was even aware she was about to give birth or if he just thought, for some reason, that he might get lucky? It is also thought that Cassis is not the father, but Alfred, the dominant male of the bai, is the father of the baby. However, maybe this response from Cassis means he is the father after all, we will never know for sure!



During this ritual by the two sitatungas, Sake would lie down periodically, only to rise again shortly after and circle round and around, seemingly agitated, then lie down again. In all this time, about half an hour, Cassis stayed by her side. After half an hour Cassis casually moved off and exited the bai. Sake, left alone, laid down again for a few minutes and the next time she rose we could visibly see a head sticking out. More excitement grew and more pictures and videos taken, with both 'Uncle' Davy and 'Auntie' Val whispering words of encouragement.



As more of the head appeared, Sake started cleaning it off, allowing the ears to push free and wiggle.



Bai News



Slowly, little by little, more of the infant started to appear and the more Sake cleared away the birthing mucus. It was not long before a good three quarters of the infant was hanging free, suspended just inches from the ground. Sake walked around in circles for a while, clearly wanting this baby out.



Then around 10:48am Sake laid down and the next thing we saw, at 10:51am, was an infant sitatunga covered in mucus, trying to stand on its own while its mother licked it clean. Finally Sonny was born into the World!

It was only half an hour after popping into this World that Sonny, clean and standing on his own, started to suckle from his mother. It was truly an amazing sight to see and one that we don't think we will ever forget!



Other Newborns

Angel: February 12th, 2015 born to Alice
Murtle: February 1st, 2015 born to Meg

Inf506: February 1st, 2015 born to Af113
Inf505: January 31st, 2015 born to Af188



Murtle & Meg

Angel & Alice



In506 & Af113



Inf505 & Af188



Bai News

Selfless siblings!

Here at Mbeli Bai we have twenty one gorilla groups that come to the bai to feed. The number of individuals in a group range from just two, to a group of thirteen. You may also be surprised to know that not all groups have adult females, like our very own single dad, Morpheus, who only has five male juveniles in his group. However, in those groups with adult females and infants, it is generally only the mother that we see taking care of her baby, with no assistance from the other members of the group. Currently we have two groups that are possibly the exception to the rule. In these two groups an altruistic behaviour has been observed in both female and male juveniles.

Let us introduce you to Conan and Zulu's group, who have teenagers that take part in the carrying and supervision of their sibling.



Hercules on his sister Jules' back



Hercules on his sister Haiti's back

Conan is responsible for twelve individuals; including two blackbacks, Hitchcock and Sherlock, three adult females, all with infants, Henna and Hercules, Agatha and Avatar and Jewel, who has just given birth to Jingles. There are also four juveniles, two females, Jules, and Haiti and two males, Mulder and Austin. Unlike behaviour monitored in other groups, we have witnessed not only the female, Haiti but the males, Mulder and Austin tolerating Hercules climbing upon their backs and being carried around. On several occasions the teenagers have left the bai carrying Hercules, allowing mum to have five minutes peace and quiet on her own in the bai. Although both Hercules and Avatar are dependant infants, it is only with Hercules that this type of behaviour has been recorded. This may be due to Hercules being older and less dependent on his mother, Henna.

In Zulu's group there are a total of eight, including the silverback, Zulu. Bofi is a young silverback, Dinka is the only adult female in the group and has two offspring, Hutu, a female juvenile and Duma, an infant male. There are also three other juveniles, two males, Teke and kikuyu and a female, Baluba. All of the juveniles assist in the care of Duma, who is still dependant, carrying him on their backs and generally watching out for him.

Since this behaviour has only been recorded in two of our groups so far, it is unclear whether this behaviour is by chance or by good parenting. It would be interesting to see if this behaviour has any influence on the kind of silverback the male juveniles will become. However, in order to find that out we would have to come back and study them in twenty years time, once they have become silverbacks and hopefully found themselves a female to start a group.



Duma on Baluba, his half sister's back



Duma on Kikuyu, his half brother's back

But for now it is just nice to see teenagers helping out instead of moodily skulking around, even if it they are gorilla teenagers! Maybe our own teenagers have something to learn from these majestic, wild animals!

Bai News



Indecisive Female!



Efi , the single lady?

Ok ladies, this one is for you! You know the saying that it is a woman's prerogative to be indecisive and change her mind? Well let us introduce you to Efi. Efi was first seen as a young female who transferred to Gretskey's group from Zulu's group. It was in Zulu's group that she had three babies, two of which sadly died. It was shortly after the birth of her third child with Zulu that Efi was seen with Gretskey and his group. Efi also eventually had a baby with Gretskey in 2012, unfortunately this infant also died about 5 months after its birth, for reasons that are unknown to us.

Shortly after losing the baby, Efi disappeared from Gretskey's group, becoming solitary and coming into the bai on her own.

She later re-appeared, this time with a solitary named Boris. Everyone was happy that Boris had finally found a mate, particularly because Gretskey already had several females in his harem and really did not need any more. So the records were changed and Boris was officially classed as a group as he had his first female.



No, wait! Efi is with Boris!



And with Gretskey?

There were a couple of occasions that Boris entered the bai on his own, but it was assumed that Efi was just in the forest out of sight. However, when Gretskey and his group turned up one day, and despite counting several times, there seemed to be an anomaly within the group. Normally fourteen, this time there were fifteen in the group. On close inspection it was determined that the fifteenth individual was, in fact, Efi. Had she grown tired of Boris and gone back to her original group? No one was sure, so we left the records as they were. Sure enough, there were another couple of visits from Boris, but with no Efi. Could he really be a solitary once again!? Just as we were starting to think this was probably the case, low and behold, Boris turned up with Efi in tow. In fact he entered the same day as Gretskey, One would hope that the story would end there, but unfortunately it has not. Efi has turned up with both Boris and Gretskey on several occasions. At the last count we think she was with Boris, saying that he has appeared several times on his own too, so we will have to wait and see!

So, you see ladies, even the gorillas of Mbeli Bai believe it is a woman's prerogative to change her mind!



Featured Story

Snake in a Boat!

Some of you may have seen the movie "Snake on a Plane", well some of our adventurous tourists had the same experience, but in a pirogue!

We were at the Bai one day when six tourists turned up, at first we did not notice there was something wrong, that only became apparent when three of them started to strip off, to their underwear! When we asked one of them why, they said they had got wet because they had capsized the pirogue they were in.



Apparently a snake, possibly a black mamba, one of the most deadliest snakes to be found here, had fallen from a tree into the pirogue.

Now, the locals have a natural aversion to the famed old serpent, and so the guys paddling the pirogue went into a bit of a panic. Fruitlessly they tried to get the snake out of the boat using their paddles, but as the snake moved further down the narrow, dugout canoe panic rose.

It was at this point it was deemed, by whom no one is actually sure, that the safest pursuit would be to capsize the pirogue, releasing the snake from its small confine and the tourists and locals from their hellish nightmare.

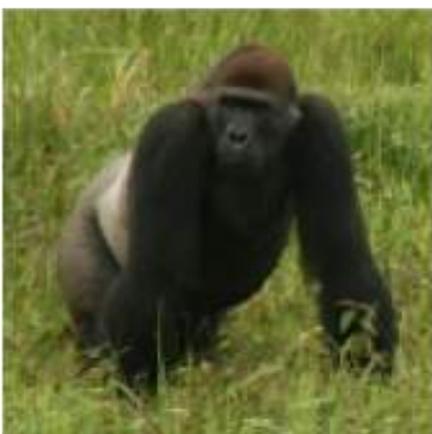
Unfortunately, along with the tourists and locals, the tourists possessions also went into the water, including a very nice and expensive DSLR camera and its lenses, phones, passports, money and plane tickets. This obviously upset the tourists, as so it should,



Luckily we have some spare clothes at the Bai, for those torrential rainy days. So rather than let the lady of the group suffer any more embarrassment by sitting in her knickers, we gave her a skirt to wear and the men some t-shirts. We did try to dry out the electrical equipment using silica, which we keep at the Bai for our own camera equipment, but it was of no use, too much water had seeped into the camera and other devices. It did not help that this day was one of those days which was particularly quiet and the tourist saw virtually nothing. Luckily, two of the three tourists were due to come back to the Bai in the morning, although they had to be re-assured that this sort of thing was not a regularly occurrence, as they would have to come back by pirogue, again. They did consider changing their itinerary, but after we offered them the use of my own DSLR camera with their memory stick, they decided to give it one more go at seeing the gorillas of Mbeli Bai.



And what day do you think this snake incident happened?NEW YEARS EVE!



So, we are pleased to say that 2015 started infinitely better than 2014 had ended! For one, their boat was NOT invaded by a deadly snake and they arrived dry! Secondly, they were fortunate enough to see the gorillas of Mbeli Bai, together with some elephant interaction in the pool, and the sitatungas graced us with their presence too. They left on New Year's Day happy and with some photos that they will be able to reminisce over in years to come.

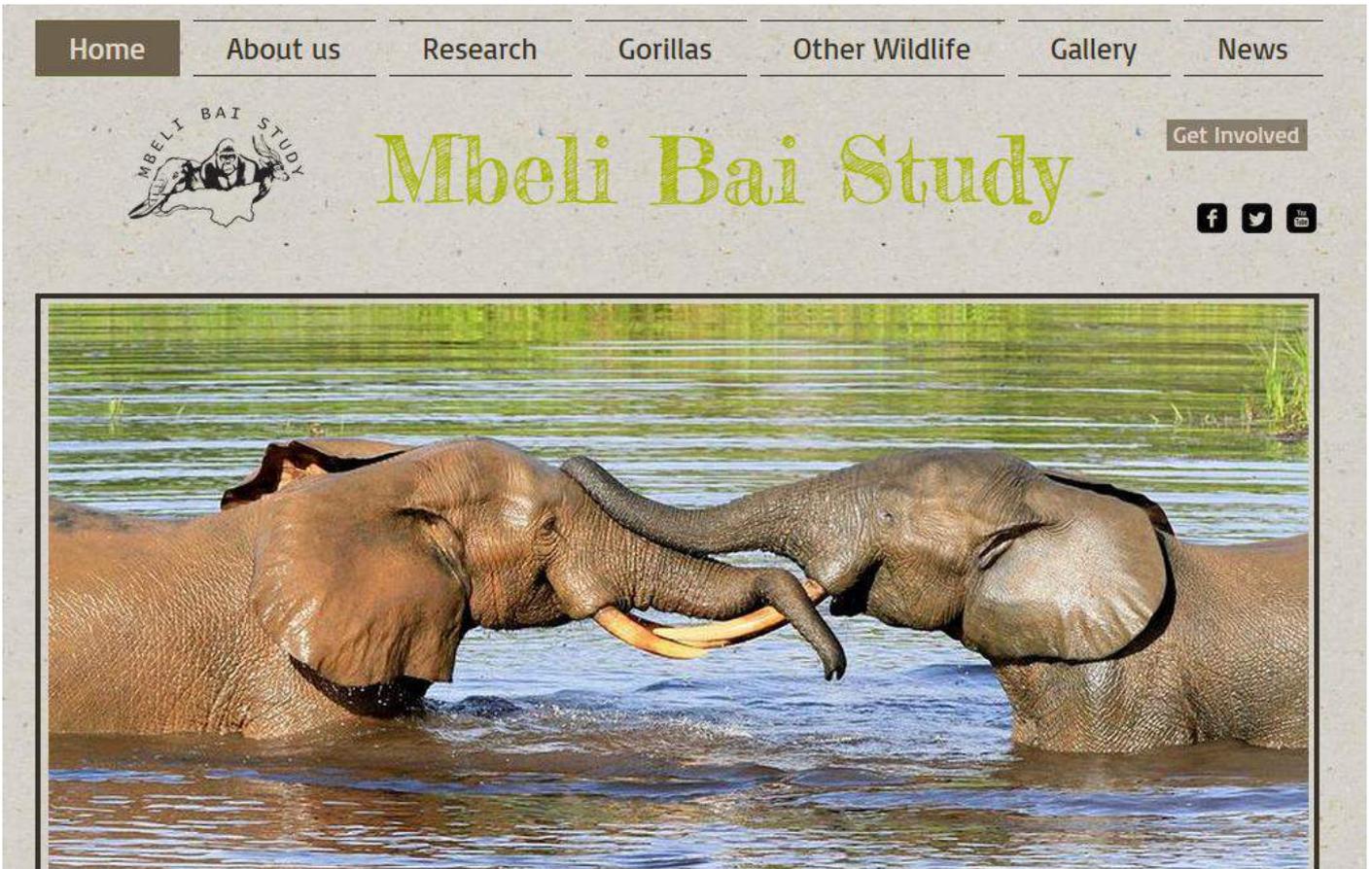
Other News



Mbeli ONLINE!!!

We finally finished the website and it is online, the address:

www.mbelibaistudy.org



We present our research, mission, education, team and much more. We have a nice Gallery with the best pictures taken last year as well as a Blog with recent posts. You will also find the annual reports since 2008 and the recently started Newsletter :)

We truly hope you will enjoy it...

We thank all our donors for their support



KÖLNER ZOO

