



ORGR BUSH TELEGRAPH

THE June 2020 EDITION



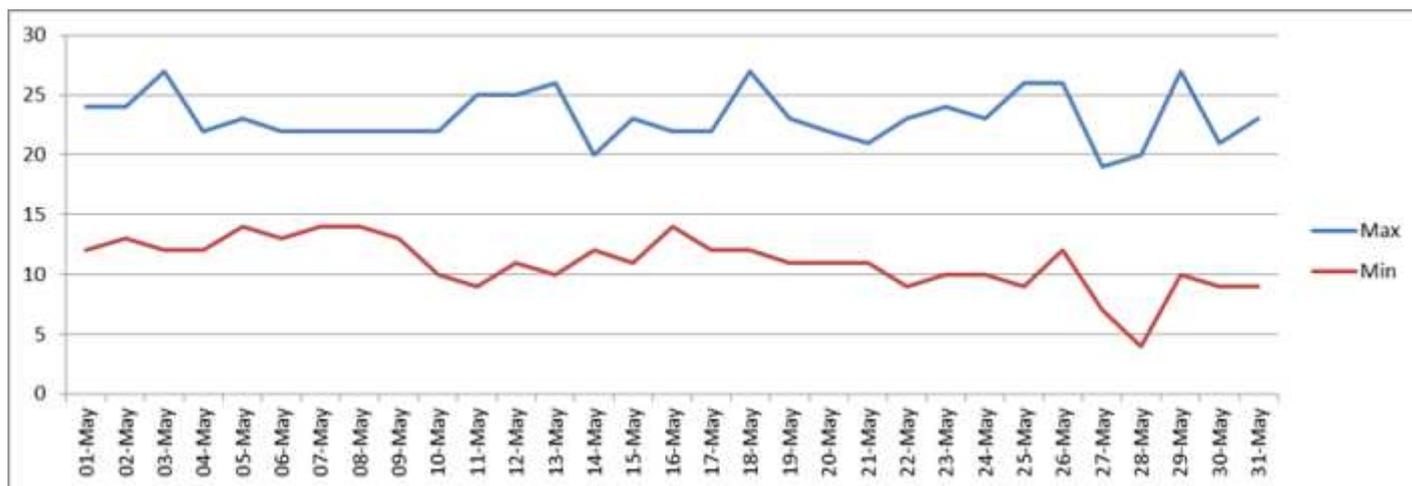
Dear Olifants Community

We find ourselves halfway through the year already and Kerry and I celebrate our 1st anniversary as an Olifants Family member on the 20th of June. Lockdown has since eased to Level Three which has allowed us to return to fairly normal operations on the reserve. Winter has arrived in all her glory, chilly mornings, and temperate days. Nothing beats that winter sun warming you up after a morning well spent on the reserve. The reserve is in tip-top condition with bountiful available grass throughout the property. We are halfway through the year and before we know it, it will be Christmas again. Level Three has allowed us to bring all of our permanent staff back to the farm, which has been fantastic. All staff are healthy, strong, and are happy to be home. We are also seeing many more members making their way to the reserve in June to get their much-needed Bush Fix!

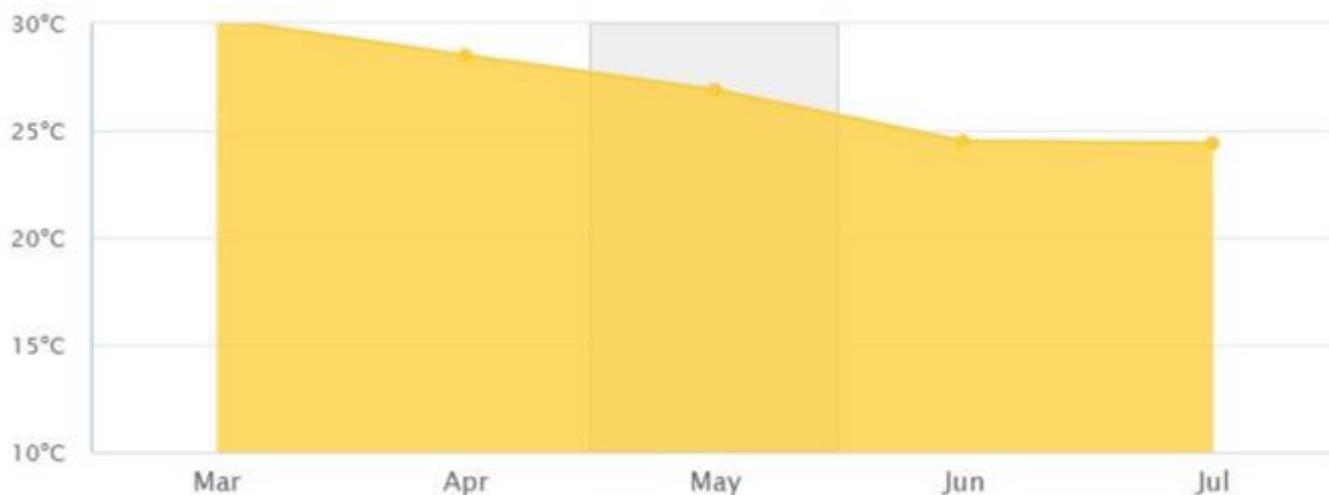
THE WEATHER REPORT

May is autumn in ORGR and is typically the 4th coldest month of the year. Daytime maximum temperatures averaged around a comfortable 27°C whilst at night 13°C is normal. We have had a few days dip below 10°C this month the cold front pulled through. We experienced maximum highs of 27 degrees and a minimum low of 4 degrees this month. Time to pull out those winter woolies, especially on your early morning game drives. We are rapidly heading towards the shortest day of the year, the winter solstice which falls on June 20th. No rain has fallen in the last month and we can assume that the rainy season has officially ended in April.

May Temperature Graph



Forecasted maximum Temperatures March to July 2020



OUR NIGHT SKIES

June In a nutshell...

Scorpio is the prominent constellation in our Winter Skies and can be seen in the eastern sky in the evening.



Moon

Date Time Phase

05/06 21h12 Full Moon

13/06 08h24 Last Quarter

21/06 08h41 New Moon

28/06 10h16 First Quarter



Moon – Earth Relations

Perigee: 364 400 km on the 03/06 at 05h36

Apogee: 404 600 km on the 15/06 at 02h56

Perigee: 369 000 km on the 30/06 at 23h44

Sun- Earth- Moon relations

Penumbral Eclipse on the 5th of June

Annular Solar Eclipse on the 21st of June

Planet Visibility

Mercury at dusk near Gemini

Venus before sunrise near Aldebaran

Mars in the morning sky near Aquarius

Jupiter and Saturn near Capricornus



Meteors

June Lyrids: 11th to 21st of June; 16th – maximum

theta-Ophiuchids: 8th – 16th of June; 13th – maximum

Some easy to identify bright stars

Antares: red supergiant in Scorpius

Arcturus: red giant in Boötes

Spica: brightest bluish-white star in Virgo

Canopus: yellowish-white star in Carina

CREATURE FEATURE

Why are Rhinos important for ecosystems?

Dr Jane Wiltshire and Dr Ian A W Macdonald



Most people understand that the poaching of rhinos is cruel and could, quite possibly, drive rhinos to extinction. But why the inordinate fuss about rhinos? Are they special enough from an ecological point of view, that ecosystems need them to be around? Of course, no species should go extinct due to man, and rhinos are iconic symbols and tourism draw-cards. But aside from those sound enough reasons, do rhinos earn the right to stay from an ecological

point of view? Rhinos are what we call a 'keystone species' – one whose presence and role within an ecosystem has a disproportionate effect on other organisms within the system. That is why we should fight to keep rhinos alive in our wild ecosystems. The rhino has several essential roles that few people are aware of, and this article hopes to highlight those lesser-known environmental and biological services that they provide.

Unlike other keystone species such as lions and wolves that are apex predators, the rhino is a mega-herbivore that 'significantly alters the habitat around [it] and thus affect[s] large numbers of other organisms'- the very definition of a keystone species.

Rhinos help shape entire ecosystems by:

Geo-forming – fundamentally reshaping the land around them over time.



By wallowing in mud puddles, they help to create natural waterholes and keep existing water holes open. Also, each time a rhino wallows, a considerable amount of mud is removed and, as it dries or is rubbed off, the fertile alluvial soil that accumulates in dams and natural waterholes is distributed far and wide, enriching the soil far from the wallow. A 2014 study by two scientists concluded that rhinos had a more significant impact on the topography than even elephants.

Rhinos not only help keep dams and waterholes open but are also responsible for the mini 'wallow dams' dotted around the edge of dams and waterholes that afford species coming to drink, such as tambourine doves, some protection from predation by terrapins. These "mini dams" also generally hold water in a way that allows antelope to have a drink with less danger of getting stuck in the mud, thus making them less vulnerable to attacks by predators who often hunt at permanent water sources.

Spreading nutrients and providing the basis of complex food chains



Rhinos consume more than 50kg of vegetation per day and deposit more than 20kg of dung. Females wander around their home ranges depositing dung and males wander around their territories, creating dung 'middens' (spots that are habitually used for defecation) as a territorial marking mechanism. This dung fertilizes the soil and provides livelihoods for many other species. Once dung is deposited, it's not long before dung beetles arrive at the party and establish their claim to a good piece of

dung by rolling it away post-haste! Once away from the dung scene, they lay their eggs in the dung ball and bury it. Some of these carefully buried brood chambers are a nutritious snack once the larvae are developed, and little carnivores/omnivores such as slender mongoose benefit greatly. This is just one example of how far the impact of rhinos stretches along the wildlife food chain. Crested guineafowl and other large birds also scratch through the dung treasure trove looking for both insects and, later in the season, undigested seed.

Playing host to scores of ectoparasites, another sophisticated food chain service.

Rhinos are plagued by ectoparasites such as the rhino fly or tabanid fly, which can be seen through binoculars by the score on the flanks of white rhino. They spend a large part of their lifecycle in the stomach of the rhino, and their existence is so tightly bound to that of rhinos that their numbers decline sharply when rhino numbers decline.

Rhinos are host to ticks, too. The ticks, in turn, sustain other species such as oxpeckers which eat them. A rhino host carrying a plethora of ticks is so prized by oxpeckers that following the flight path of these noisy birds is often the easiest way to locate the rhinos themselves! Terrapins, too, feed on the ticks carried by rhinos when rhinos drink and wallow at waterholes.

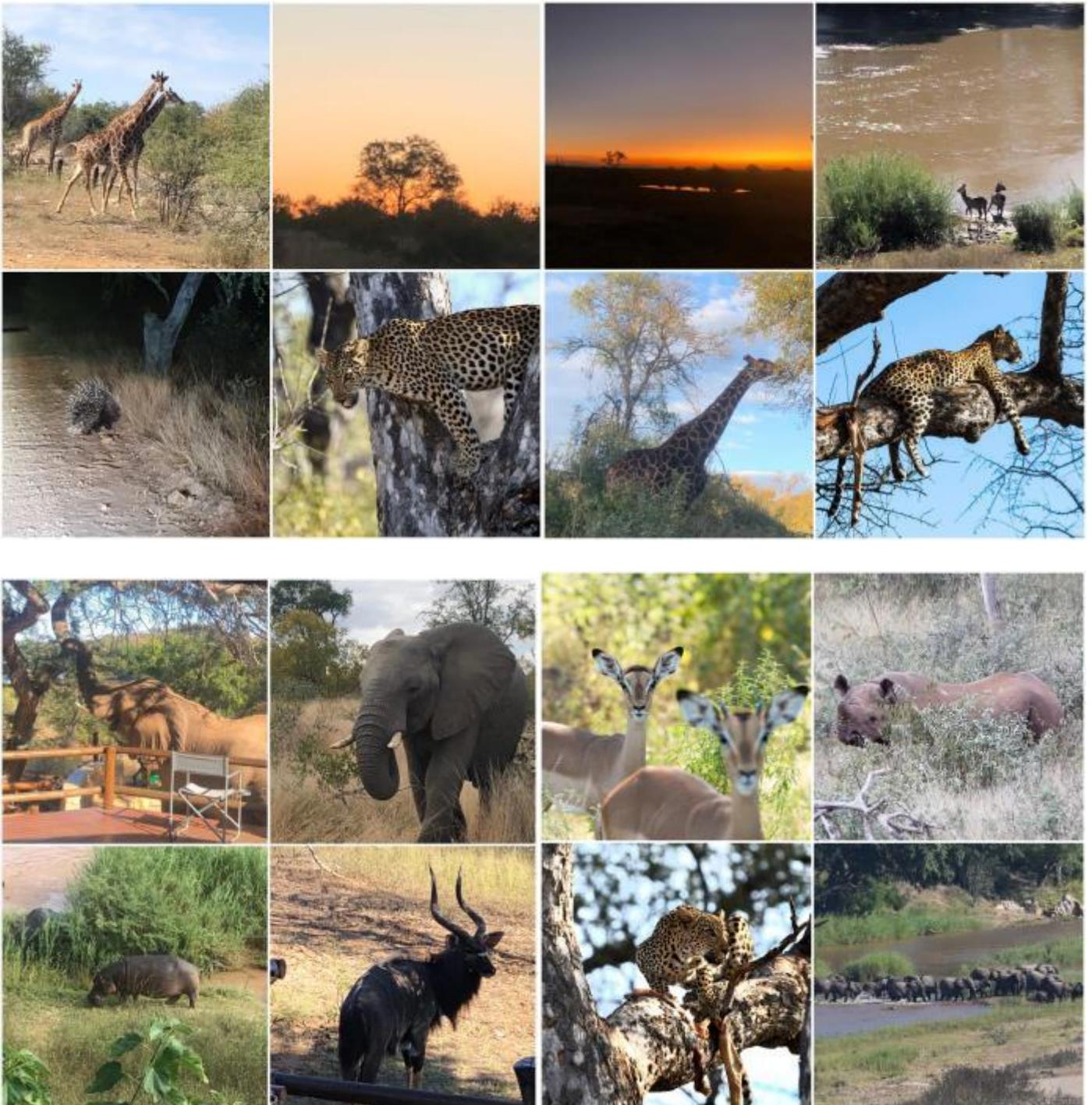
Modify vegetation by establishing and maintaining short-grass 'lawns.'



Short grass lawns are essential for the survival of certain plants, for example, short annual grasses such as *Tragus berteronianus* (Carrot Seed Grass) in an otherwise perennial grass sward; this benefits ungulates such as wildebeest; and birds such as longclaws, larks, and pipits. These species cannot survive in wooded or long-grass ecosystems. White rhinos mow the grass to a height that provides suitable habitat for these species. These rhino lawns also act as areas of sanctuary during veld fires (for slow-moving tortoises, for example) and for plant species that cannot tolerate fire.

THE GAME DRIVE

Olifants River Game Reserve is still producing incredible game viewing. The diversity of wildlife, birds, and habitats is astounding, and being part of the greater Kruger allows for natural free movement of animals over vast tracks of land. We are incredibly privileged to be able to witness nature at this level. Below is a snapshot of sightings on Olifants from our Members who were on the reserve in May. Many thanks to Alistair Hewitt, Steve Beasley, Charles Reynolds, and Shaylin Moore for contributing to this month's gallery. Keep those photos coming!



CONSERVATION MATTERS

#1 Rhino News

Rhino activity on the reserve is up dramatically with the seasonal change. Water availability is becoming restricted to watering holes resulting in a concentrated population. We also have excellent grazing available which also attracts White Rhinos back into our area. The hotspots on the reserve for Rhino viewing are Wild Dog Pan, Warthog Pan, and Lisbon. Black Rhinos are frequenting, Sable, Idube, and Wild Dog Pan. The horned Back Rhino reported last month has not been seen again. Both Black and White Rhinos are due to be dehorned again in the coming months to ensure they do not present themselves as an attractive target to poachers.

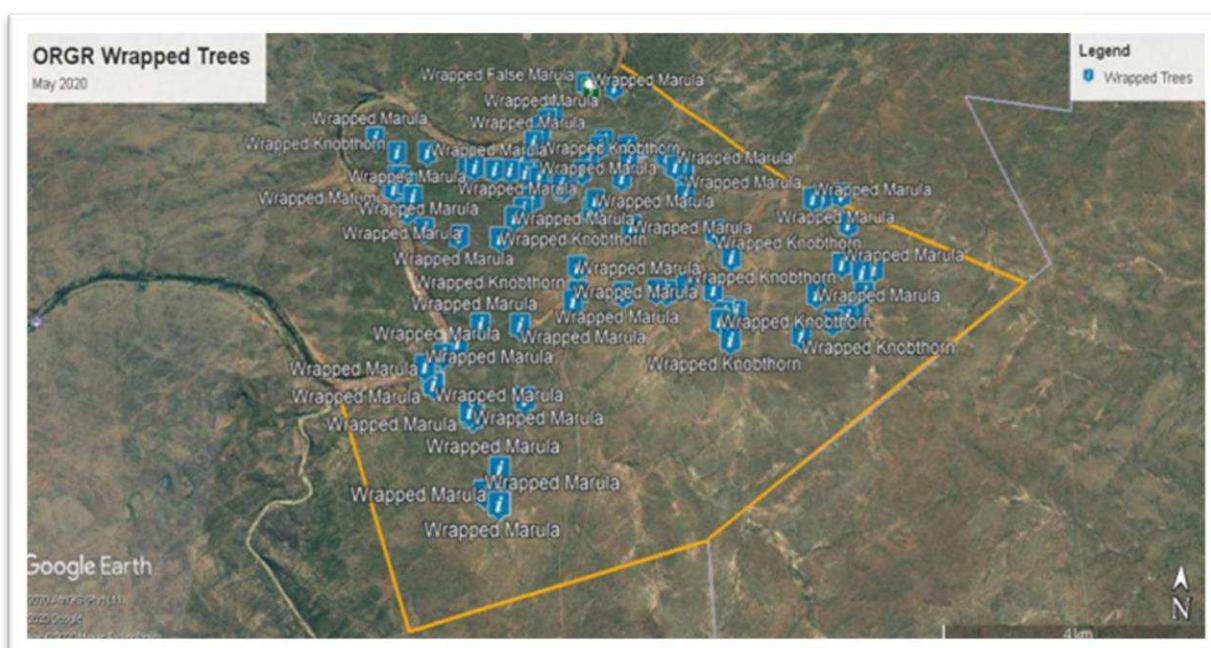


#2 The Lion Cub Saga

The cubs were seen twice in May. Both sightings report indicated that the three cubs' condition was still good which means they have been surviving on their own. An incredible feat for such young Lions. We suspect they have been eating ground birds and possibly small mammals like rodents and hares. We have not seen them for 14 days now so we are unsure of their fate but will continue to keep an eye out for them.

#3 Project Forest

We have managed to wrap a good number of trees in May. The below map indicates the distribution of the trees we have done so far since starting the project. We are doing well and will continue to wrap trophy trees thought the reserve to protect them from being damaged by Elephants.



#4 Security Report

It has been another quiet month on the Security front which is just the way we like it. There have been no Incursions or Rhinos lost in May. Our APU is operating at full force to ensure we are keeping the current trend. The fact that incursion and incidents are down is proof that we are doing a great job on the ground presenting a very hard target to poachers. We are however entering a very high-risk time of the year with the river level dropping and increased Rhino activity in our area. We remain on high alert, as always!

We have reignited the ORGR K9 element to our Anti-Poaching efforts and have introduced a tracking dog to the team. We are now fully self-sufficient should we have an incursion with fresh tracks. The dog will save us an immense amount of time, the time we would normally spend visual tracking ourselves and waiting for a tracking dog to arrive on site. Our APU dog is called Jan and has settled into the reserve very well. He has proven himself an amazing tracker and we have tested him on 3-hour old tracks over a distance of 4km.! Many thanks to the donors whose support has enabled us to the K9 element, as dogs have proven to be one of the most important role players in the fight to curb Rhino poaching.



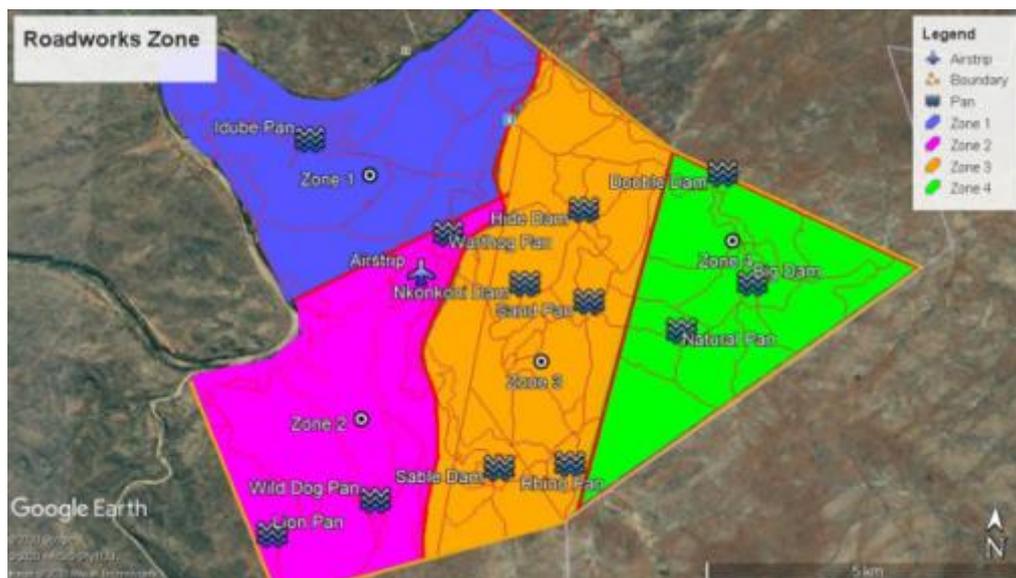
#5 Idube Pan

You probably won't easily recognise the beautiful waterhole pictured here on the right! Its Idube pan and has been restored to a more natural appearance by removing the unsightly concrete water delivery system. Water is now delivered to the pan via a concealed underground pipe, and the look and feel of the pan has greatly been improved.



THE MEMBERS UPDATE

Roads



We have completed the maintenance we had planned for May. Zones 1 and Zones 2 have been graded, dragged, drains opened and most ruts filled. We will be finishing off a few areas west of the railway line and will then move into Zones 3 followed by Zone 4. These areas are in fairly good condition which means repair will be quite quick compared to zones 1 and 2. The railway line road had a light grade at the beginning of May and was dragged twice.

Occupancy

Occupancies for May have been stable with 8 Units on the reserve for the month. Several members who were with us for lockdown opted to use the one-week travel window to return to their homes outside of the reserve. We are expecting additional arrivals onto the farm in June as restrictions are slowly lifted, members are welcome to visit their reserve if they can obtain the permits to travel. We look forward to seeing more of you soon!

May 2020					
	Occupancy	No of Units		Occupancy	No of Units
Week 1	9%	8	Week 3	9%	8
Week 2	9%	8	Week 4	9%	8

Fire Risk

Fire season is upon us and we all please need to be very vigilant with all open fires on the reserve. This is particularly important as the dry grass fuel load on the reserve is extremely high, and the risk will increase as we head towards the hotter and dryer months in October. Please ensure you all practice exceptional caution with any boma or braai fire you are lighting during the next couple of months. Skoffels on Madrid were completed this month with Grootdraai to be completed in June.

Fire Fighting Equipment

We have now taken delivery of our two new 500l rapid response trailers. They are a great addition to our fire response gear and will help bridge the vital time gap that the large 2000l bowser takes to arrive at an incident. They will be housed in the workshop area for easy access by staff when required.



Unit Fire Fighting Facilities

I must note though that the quickest response to any fire will always be at the unit itself if facilities are available.

In this regard I would like to please urge members to have a dedicated fire house installed at the unit. Some of the newer units already have these in place.

Cost of installation is R2409,33 per unit and you can place your orders directly with the office and we will ensure installation takes place as rapidly as possible

Please also note that fire covers/drums are compulsory.



Waste Management

This is proving to be a great deal more difficult than we imagined and many members are not separating organic compostable materials from inorganic recyclable materials. We will continue to work hard at member education in this regard and appeal for your assistance as it makes a huge difference to waste management effectiveness and efficiency.

Classifieds

Unit 25 has been sold recently. The transfer of the share will go through once the deeds office is operational again. This leaves a full share in Units 83 and 76 available, as well a third share in units 54 and 22. Please contact the office for any further information.

STAFF PROFILE OF THE MONTH



Mateo Mbambo is our expert Grader operator. He is responsible for manoeuvring the huge CAT grading machine throughout Olifants ensuring we all have a smooth surface to ride on.

Mateo was born in a small village in Mozambique close to Maputo and moved to South Africa with this father when he was just a few years old. He joined Olifants on the 15th of November 2007 as a labourer. His father was James who used to operate the grader and whom he learned his skills from. He grew up in Summerset Village in Bushbuck Ridge.

Mateo received his formal qualification as a Grader Operator in March last year after honing his skill for 10 years, and he is a true master at what he does!

Thank you Mateo.

THE LAST WORD

Lastly, I am delighted to introduce you to a new member of the Olifants management team.



We have acquired our own personal dog Page, from the Southern African Wildlife College. Page is a 5-year-old Beagle who has been working in Kruger for some years as a tracking dog. She is predominantly my companion dog but is an expert tracker capable of tracking both human and wildlife trails. I will be very happy to use her for reserve work should the need arise, but Jan remains the primary working dog for the APU. She is a wonderful little creature and has enriched Kerry and my life greatly.

That's it from us all at Olifants River Game Reserve.

Stay safe, keep in touch, and catch you on Sunset Plains for a Sundowner!

All the best, Nick and the ORGR team

