



## ORGR BUSH TELEGRAPH

*THE March 2020 EDITION*

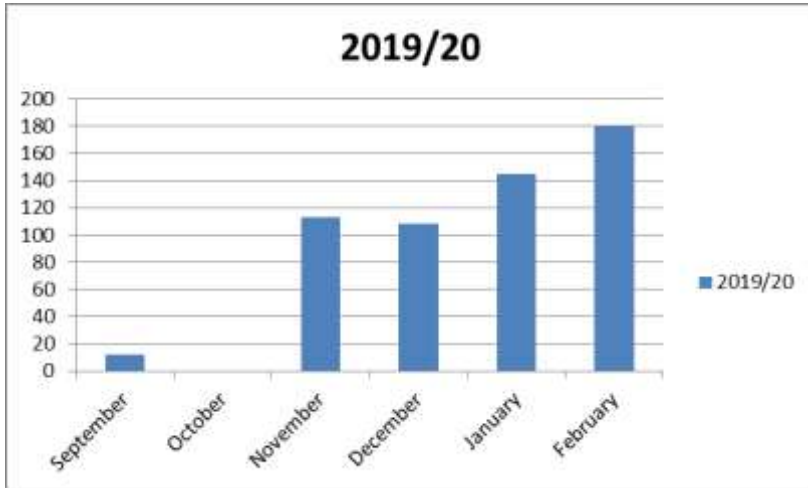


Dear Olifants Community

Greetings from a lush Olifants River Game Reserve. The property is looking superb with the vegetation flourishing after an abundant rainy period. The season is starting to change with a tangible drop in the early morning temperatures and in some areas the grass is starting to show signs of yellowing. An indication that autumn is on the way. In this crazy, uncertain world, Olifants remains a place to reconnect with nature and rediscover yourself; we hope to see you all on the reserve very soon!

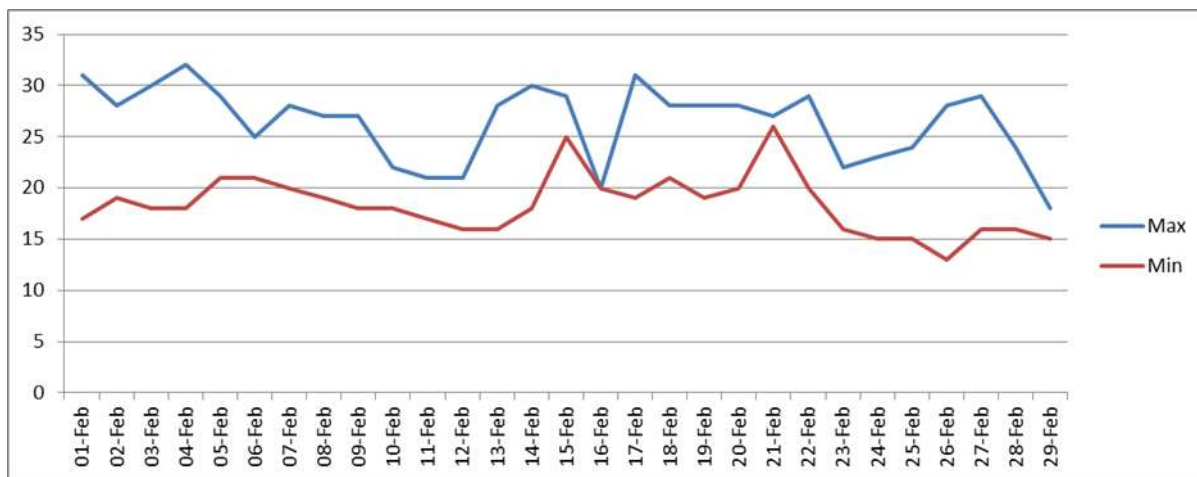
# THE WEATHER REPORT

February has brought us 180mm of rain which brings our total up to 558, 5 mm for the season. The last time we had this amount of rain up to February was in the 2012/2013 season. On the 10th of February, we had another mega downpour of 100mm overnight. The rains have brought the reserve to life; the grasses are doing extremely well which will ensure for a decent seed bank for the following years to come. We are still expecting rains for March and April.

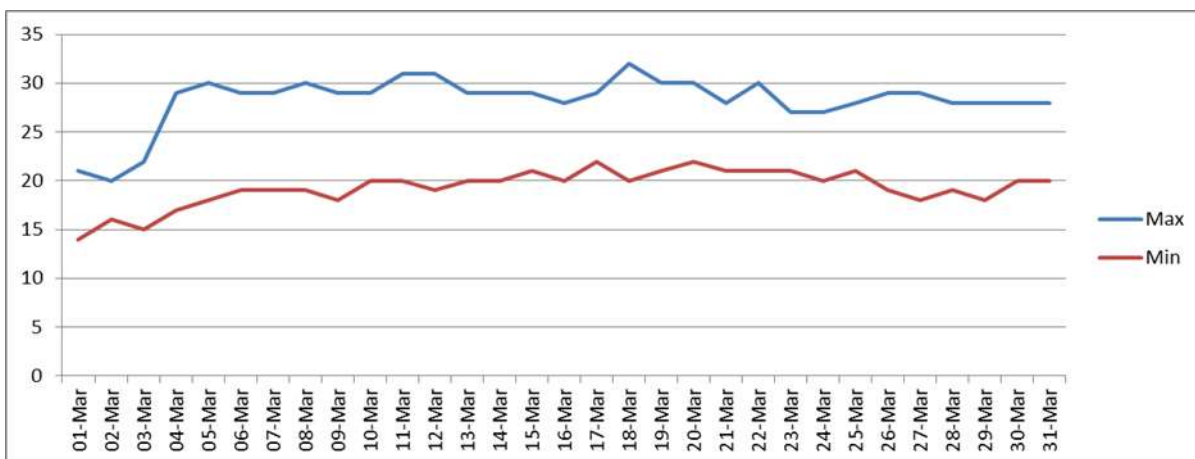


Temperatures have been moderate in February with our average high of 26 degrees and an average low temperature of 18 degrees. The last week in February saw our minimum temperature drop below 15 degrees which is a clear indication of the seasonal change.

## February Temperatures



The temperature forecast for March below indicated it will be a mild month temperature-wise.



## THE GAME DRIVE

.Game viewing on Olifants remains excellent despite the thick vegetation present on the reserve. General game species like Zebra, Wildebeest, Kudus, Impala, Warthog, and Giraffe are readily seen throughout the property. Grass viewing in particular is fantastic ☺ with many different species flourishing in the area due to our great rainfall.

Leopard sightings have been frequent with the hot spots being Lisbon, Office Crossing and Pels Loop. Lions sightings have been good in February with multiple prides seen in the area, one sighting, in particular, that were shared by Brian and Claire from unit 56 is shared below. This sighting was seen on the second Palm crossing at Warthog. Two lionesses with 3 little cubs each and a third lioness heavily pregnant. The next generation is on the way!



The pack of 7 Wild Dogs has visited the reserve on a few occasions this month. We have noticed that one of the individuals has bite marks on her face and rump, which is more than likely due to a dispute with hyenas. The injuries were superficial and natural with no need to intervene. The cheetah have been absent for February and we hope they return for a few days soon once the bush thins out a little in autumn. Thank you Andrew Surtees for the Photo.

Terry Forsdyke shared this amazing sighting of a Red-Crested Korhaan and her newly hatched chick. The chick joined our world after an incubation period of 22 days in a simple scrape nest on the ground. They generally lay between one and two eggs at a time.



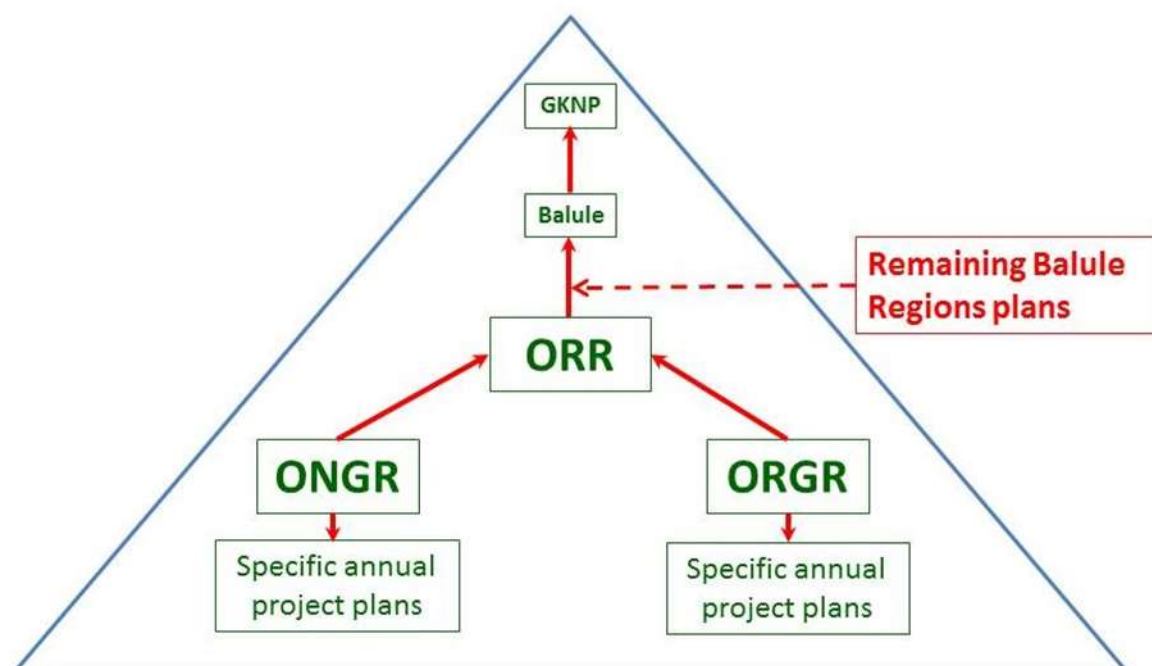
## Project Harmony – Conservation Management Plan

ORGR now has a final Conservation Management Plan in place in conjunction with Olifants North; we named it “Project Harmony”. The Boards of ORGR and ONGR agreed to pursue a combined management plan as far as is possible. For aspects of this plan that affect both reserves, they are referred to here as ORR (Olifants River Reserves). This plan serves to feed into the Balule Nature Reserve (BNR) plan currently in review with the Chairman. The plan is broken down into the “Compliance Document” – Land Management Plan for ORR and an Operational Action Plan which is reserve specific and outlines the actual plans for projects and the ongoing operation of our reserve. Our consulting Ecologists who assisted us in putting this all together are Pete Zacharias; (DSc, M.G.S.S.A) and Mike Peel (PhD; Pr.Sci.Nat; M.G.S.S.A), both well known in the conservation field,

Why do we need such a plan in place? Privately owned Protected Areas are playing an increasingly important, and near critical, role in the management and conservation of South Africa's natural resources and biodiversity. It is not enough to just “manage” and management activities must be undertaken with a purposeful long-term objective in mind. Effective wildlife management requires a multi-faceted plan that is objectives driven. The management plans for the individual APNR reserves are compiled in terms of the National Environment Management: Protected Areas Act No. 57 of 2003 (NEM: PAA) and are presented as an adjunct to the Associated Private Nature Reserves (APNR) Management Plan. The APNR Management Plan, which has been approved by the relevant authorities in the Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces, currently provides the overarching principles and guidelines for the management of the greater protected area.

In this context, the ORR plan forms part of a hierarchy of plans that are integrated to meet legislative obligations as well as providing integrated management tools at the level of the geographic region known as the APNR, a 270 000 ha conservation area sharing an 85 km open boundary with the central part of the KNP.

## Structure for plans for Project Harmony



The primary objective of such a plan from a member's view point is::

“Enjoy an exceptional bushveld experience, in its entirety, in a manner which respects the environment, being ecologically sensitive and sustainable, in order to retain and enhance the experience and the associated property value”.

It is important to understand that the development of a Land Management Action Plan is not a once-off activity but a continuous process, which should remain a key focus of all ORR members, as led by their Boards. Within the framework of the plan, there are several important principles that apply:

- We should set short, medium and long term objectives and implement these changes in accordance with our sustainable management plan, all of which are constrained by cost, time and season;
- Whilst, the impact of any management activity may take a long time to provide tangible results, good or bad, the benefits of a well-defined plan curbs the need for ad hoc practices and knee-jerk responses;
- In many instances, there is a broad set of potential activities we could embark on, on which many experts may differ. Ultimately, the approach taken remains the decision of the ORR Boards but, importantly, any activity should not be knowingly ecologically detrimental;
- Without a baseline reference, ongoing monitoring and good record keeping of management activities, they become wasteful and ineffective, as we cannot objectively assess the outcomes to determine whether the management actions should continue, be expanded, refined, changed or abandoned – this is akin to the extensive data kept by large corporations from which they derive their Strategic Business Intelligence and will be familiar to most members of ORR;
- Ecosystems are in a continual state of flux or change – even without the intervention of man – but an effective management plan reduces the negative impact of short-term human interventions; and
- This system is broadly influenced at two scales; 1) globally, where we deal with issues such as climate change; and 2) locally, where we deal with management issues such as artificial water points, bush encroachment, rehabilitation, etc.
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Our Operational Action Plan contains the following aspects of conservation management.

- Research and Monitoring
- Erosion Reclamation
- Road Maintenance
- Borrow Pits and Quarries
- Fire Management
- Alien Plant Control
- Water Management
- Artificial Water Point Management
- Waste Management
- Pollution Reduction
- Tree Protection
- Safety and Security
- Infrastructure Management



*“It is surely our responsibility to do everything within our power to create a planet that provides a home not just for us, but for all life on Earth.” - Sir David Attenborough*



# CONSERVATION MATTERS

## #1 EXPERIMENTAL REHABILITATION PROJECT



Our Serengeti Plains Project is going well. The Grass seeds have germinated and grass has started growing from the seeded blocks. The unseeded blocks are producing very little regrowth from a grass perspective, although the usual forbs and bulbs are coming back. This indicates virtually no grass seed bank was present in the area. At this stage, there does not seem to be any significant difference between the fertilized blocks and the non-fertilized blocks. We still have two months left for rains to fall and hope that the grass will mature before winter arrives.

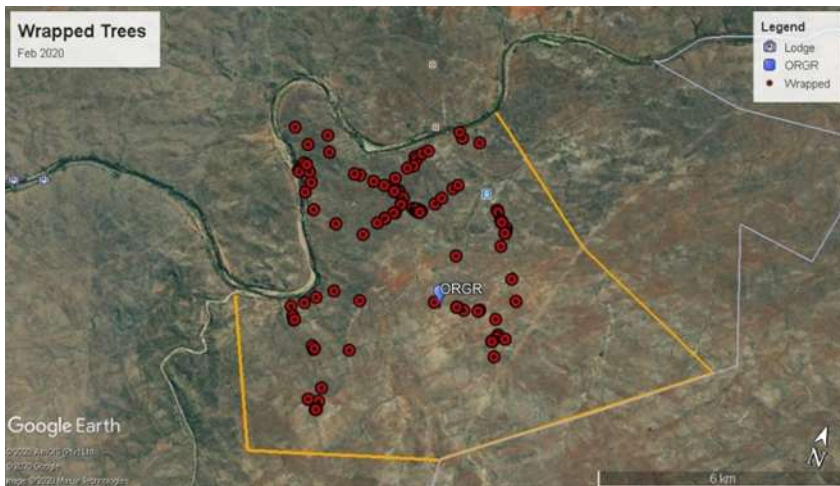
## #2 RHINO NEWS

It has been a fairly quiet month for Rhinos. We have one report of a horned cow and calf sighted on Lisbon and again from a passing helicopter close to Buff Plains but we never got her visual on the ground. She seems to be quite skittish. The two Rhino we dehorned in Pridelands spent a few days on ORGR and we had some great sightings of them, very relaxed animals.

No Black Rhinos were sighted during February although their tracks have been present around Wild Dog Pan and Sable Dam.



### #3 PROJECT FOREST



Project forest continues to grow; we now have over 120 newly wrapped trees on the reserve. In March we will be moving into Lisbon to wrap trophy trees as it is an area we have not done yet. The above map indicates the spread of the newly wrapped trees so far.

### #4 INJURED ELEPHANT TREATMENT

On Sunday the 23rd of February we received a report from Unit 82 that there was an injured elephant on Palm Loop Drive. We responded and found the animal to have an injured front left leg. The initial prognosis was a broken leg and we expected to have to put the animal down. The vets came in and darted the Elephant. He was examined and we found what looked like a small-calibre gunshot wound in the lower section of his leg. This was probably caused by someone trying to chase the elephant away from a compound by shooting in front of the animal. Potentially a bullet ricocheted off the ground into the elephant's leg. The animal was treated with antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs before being set off back into the wild. He was seen a few days ago along the river looking a lot better. We will continue to monitor him to check his progress. All in all a successful operation.





## #5 SECURITY (Callan Hartman)

February has been a quiet month in terms of rhino poaching, with no poaching incidents to report. Although, we were kept busy by Mozambican immigrants and gunshot reports. With a huge amount of rain having fallen in the area this month, the Olifants River is flowing strongly, making it very difficult to cross, which we believe has played a significant role in there being no rhino poaching activity on ORGR.

As mentioned above, we had an incident-free month in terms of rhino poaching, but we did, however, have an incident involving Mozambican immigrants and another involving a report of 3 gunshots that turned out to be a false alarm.

On the 3rd of February 2020, we responded to tracks reported in Struwig along the river. Upon arrival, we quickly determined that the tracks had not been left by rhino poachers but probably illegal immigrants. We knew that we were not dealing with rhino poachers because the suspects had made no effort to disguise their tracks and they were walking barefoot. We managed to track the 2 individuals from the Klaserie boundary with Balule, all the way to the railway bridge (+-7km). We lost the tracks at the railway bridge which led us to believe that they had crossed the bridge north into Doreen. We were unable to find any tracks on the Northside of the bridge, so we notified the Doreen APU of the situation and asked them to check further North along the railway. ORGR APU stood down at this point. A few hours later the Doreen APU managed to make the arrest, and as we had suspected it was two Mozambican immigrants, a mother, and her 17-year-old son. SAPS were called and the suspects were taken into custody, this marked the end to a successful operation.

On the 17th of February 2020 at 01:38, Jabulan (ORGR Field Ranger) reported hearing 3 gunshots in the direction of Sable Dam. The rest of the ORGR APU quickly assembled. A compass bearing of the gunshots was taken; Callan and his team began the follow-up assisted by Jaques from MRNR. He walked on the bearing for 3km but was unable to find any signs of rhino poachers. The area was searched by helicopter later that morning and no rhino carcass was found. Thankfully, the gunshots reported had been a false alarm. We believe the gunshot noises may have come from the train or elephants feeding in the area.

Although we have had another incident-free month on ORGR, and the number of days since the last incident (79) keeps growing, we will not let our guard down. At the moment we are very fortunate that the level of the Olifants River is high because as soon as the water level drops, we are going to see an increase in rhino poaching activity. We will be ready.



# THE MEMBERS UPDATE

## ENTRY GATE UPGRADES

The new gate system is working very well and is giving us very accurate records of entry and exits at the Southern Gate. All contractors and suppliers have to be pre-registered and will not be allowed access without an entry pin issued by the ORGR office. No persons are allowed to enter or Exit the reserve without formal identification on the form of South African ID's and Driver licenses. International Passports are not compatible at this stage and a photograph of the Passports is taken by the scanners as a record of entry. We thank you all for your patience during the setup of this new system, there is still some tweaking to be done.

## ROADS

February hit us hard with 180mm of rain which has kept us busy on the road networks. The rains have washed quite a few roads away. Sadly the 100mm downpour hit just days after a lot of work had been completed on the reserve which put us back to zero. But we are continuing with the repair works. Even after the repeated heavy rains roads are generally in good condition. The constant reopening of the mitre drains was a great success. Road maintenance continues in full swing, we have identified many more problem areas and have scheduled the necessary repairs. Erosion areas of concern have been identified and plans to install Gabion cages are in progress.

The Railway road has been graded once during February, just after the 100mm of rain and we have dragged tires 3 times during the month. The entrance road is in good shape.

Elephant walk and Hippo way were graded at the beginning of February but were washed away again after the 100mm downpour on the 10th. The Grader will get to them once it has completed the roads in Lisbon and Madrid. We have installed new Rock Gabions along the flood plains on Elephant walk to slow down the water rushing over the road causing the large ruts.

Extensive grading has taken place between the 4 powerlines and the Railway line in February to tackle all the damage from the rains. Roads graded include Boy Boys Road, Rhino Walk, Sable Drive, Q's Corner, Scratching Post, Wallows, Mashatu Drive, Snake Alley, Old Cutline, Zebra Drive, Wildebeest Drive, Buff Plains 1, 2, 3, Nyoga Loop, Sand Loop, Cheetah Drive, Hide Loop, Mala Lane, moving north and into Lisbon. Some patchwork has been done around the airstrip roads and along Lauries Lookout and the Airstrip has been graded towards the end of February. We are moving into Lisbon, Madrid and Grootdraai next, to address the areas around Big Dam, Warthog Pan, Wild Dog Pan and the main arterial roads Elephant Walk and Hippo Way.

## OCCUPANCY

The average occupancy for the month of January was 12,13% with an average of 10.31 Units in residence. February has been quite a consistent month in terms of occupancy but slightly busier towards the end of the month. Lowest occupancy was 7% with 6 Units on the property and it peaked at 17.65% with 15 Units in.

February 2020					
	Occupancy	No of Units		Occupancy	No of Units
Week 1	11%	9	Week 3	11%	9
Week 2	14%	12	Week 4	14%	12

## CLASSIFIEDS

We have a few units on the market at the moment. This includes a third Share of Unit 22, third Share in Unit 54 a full share of Unit 76 and a full share of Unit 83. Please contact the office should you have queries on units for sale.

### Oasis Drinking Water

Oasis in Hoedspruit has a new offering they are extending to reserves and lodges in the area. They install purified water storage solutions at no cost to the customer besides paying for the water used. We are going to trial this at the office. A 750l water tank with an Ozonator and pump will be installed outside of the office and members will be able to top up their bulk water containers on the reserve instead of getting their bottles filled in Hoedspruit. Oasis will then come and refill the tank when needed and charge us for the water used. The cost of the water is R1.97/L. This will hopefully be in place within the next three weeks and we will update you all once it is installed and operational.

### Waste Management

The organic pit is not seeing as much organic waste as I was hoping for, but I expected it to gain momentum slowly. I would like to encourage Members to continue to separate their Food waste and Recyclables as per the chart below.

Organic	Recyclables
Vegetable	Plastics
Meat	Glass
Bones	Tins
Tea Bags	Regular Paper
Coffee Grinds	Cardboard
Wooden Skewers and Toothpicks	Metal
Paper Towel and paper serviettes	

## THE LAST WORD

### Staff Profile of the Month

Martha Hlabangane is this month's staff member in the spotlight. She was born in Somerset village on the western boundary of the Sabi Sands Game Reserve. Both her parents were born in the same village and she has deep roots in that area. She grew up with 4 brothers. When she is on leave, enjoys taking care of her home and going to church on Sundays.

Her first job after finishing school was at Olifants. She started in 1994 and has been part of the family ever since. She is responsible for keeping the Office, Clubhouse and Management houses in order and we could not do without her. She is married to Friday, who works in our maintenance teams as a Front End Loader operator and general assistant. They do not have any children together.



And that's a wrap for February! We welcome March with open arms and look forward to the upcoming change in season. Easter is around the corner and if you are heading down to the reserve, drive safely and send the Easter Bunny your forwarding address.

Catch you on Sunset plains for a Sundowner!

All the best, Nick and the ORGR team

