



## ORGR BUSH TELEGRAPH

*The February 2021 EDITION*



**Hello Olifants Community!**

We trust you are all well wherever this newsletter finds you. March is already upon us and there is a tangible change in the air as we slowly move from our Summer season into Autumn. The lush green grass is already starting to adopt a slight blonde tinge and nighttime temperatures are starting to deliver the slightest of chills. A change in season is always a great time to be in the bush as we watch our natural environment slowly transform.

## THE GAME DRIVE

General game viewing has been excellent with zebras and wildebeest regularly seen on the reserve. Giraffe, kudu, warthog, waterbuck and steenbok are also in good numbers. Two sable have been seen around Wild Dog Pan. These are part of the group that was reintroduced in Diniza a few months back. Nice to see them still in the area and doing well. The small pack of wild dogs has been present on the reserve as well as a much larger pack of almost 30 individuals which have come over from Klaserie on a few occasions. It is always thrilling to see this unique species in such large numbers. Both our resident lion prides are still seen regularly and leopard viewing has been absolutely world-class. Birdlife remains very prolific and the migrants will start moving out of the area within the next month or so. The insect life has been fascinating to watch, with the excellent rains and phenomenal veld conditions, the variety has been incredible.





## Creature Feature: Scrub Hare (*Lepus saxatilis*)

With Easter around the corner, we thought it appropriate to highlight our resident "Easter Bunny". These energetic little creatures are frequently seen on our roads at night. The scrub hare, unlike the rabbit, does not have a burrow to escape to when threatened. Instead, it relies on its large ears to detect danger and extremely powerful legs to make a fast getaway. It lives in savannah woodland and avoids the open grasslands where cover is limited. Scrub hares are the most common Lagomorphs in the Lowveld.



During the day, scrub hares hide out in thick undergrowth vegetation. While sleeping they flatten themselves and the vegetation where they have been lying typically takes the shape of their bodies. Consequently, the dens of scrub hares are known as 'forms'. A. They are equipped with long powerful legs for running and long ears for enhanced hearing. Their young, known as leverets, are extremely precocial (fully furred, eyes open and can move from birth) as they need to be able to escape danger immediately. Remarkably, leverets will be totally independent of their parents within one month. The young of rabbits, known as kittens, are typically altricial (eyes closed, helpless and reliant upon parental care) as they have the safety of a warren in which to develop after birth.

Scrub hares are vegetarians and eat grass, roots and tubers, which are digested by a hindgut fermentation system, meaning all their food is digested in a large central stomach and only exposed to cellulose-decaying micro bacteria late in the digestive process. This means that digestion is quick but not as effective as it could be. For this reason, hares practice coprophagia (the consumption of dung) to maximize on the undigested nutrients still in their dung. During the night, hares produce vitamin-rich, soft green caecotropic faeces, which are immediately re-eaten directly from the anus to extract the moisture and additional nutrients in the dung; and to replenish the micro bacteria in the gut. The following day, they produce the more familiar hard pellets, which are discarded – a process known as refection.

### STATISTICS

**Size**

50 cm (females slightly larger than males)

**Weight**

2-3 kg

**Lifespan**

8 years

**Habitat**

Woodland and scrub

**Gestation**

42 days

**Number of young**

1-3

**Food**

Grass, roots, tubers

**Predators**

Jackals, Verreaux's Eagle Owl, Pythons, Caracal, Leopard, Lion

# CONSERVATION

## Tuberculosis and our wildlife

TB is a disease that affects a wide range of wildlife in southern Africa and our local Pom Pom pride are showing symptoms. Sadly there are currently no veterinary interventions that Conservation Managers can use to treat wildlife. The below article briefly explains how the Kruger ended up with the disease and how it impacts our wildlife.

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease affecting cattle and a variety of wildlife worldwide. It is caused by a bacteria (*Mycobacterium bovis*) that gains access to the body via the respiratory or alimentary tracts or through the skin.

Depending on the climate, the bacteria can survive for days to weeks in the environment. The first reported cases of TB in wildlife in South Africa were in 1928, when the disease was recorded in kudu and common duiker. An isolated case of TB in an impala in the Crocodile Bridge region of the Kruger National Park was recorded in 1967.

TB was most likely introduced into the KNP on the southern boundary following the intermingling of buffaloes and infected cattle in the 1960s or 1980s but remained undetected until 1990 when it was diagnosed in a 2-year-old buffalo bull. Currently, more than 90% of the buffalo herds in the South of Kruger have TB. Buffalo infect each other by the inhalation of infected droplets produced by coughing or sneezing shedders.

When infection progresses to disease, buffaloes gradually become emaciated and anorexic. In advanced cases, coughing and breathing with difficulty is seen. In Africa, buffalo are maintenance hosts (carry the disease) and it is suggested that lions and kudu may be additional maintenance hosts.

Infection is due to incidental spillover from infected buffalo to susceptible species. TB has been recorded in 13 species, as follows, in the KNP: buffalo, lion, kudu, eland, warthog, bushpig, large spotted genet, leopard, spotted hyena, cheetah, baboon, impala and honey badger.

Buffalo carcasses are the most likely sources of infection in carnivores, particularly lions, which are infected via the gut when feeding on infected carcasses. In the KNP, buffaloes constitute about 4% of the lion's total food. Once infected a lion can shed the virus in aerosols and infect other members in the pride due to their highly social nature. Infected lions may show signs of progressive weight loss, poorly healing skin wounds, joint swellings, muscle loss, and eye lesions.

TB in lions contributes to lower lion survival and breeding success. Increased cub death due to faster territorial male turnover is occurring. Abnormal sex ratios have been observed and some male and female prides have been evicted from their territories. In the KNP and surrounding areas, a progressive northward spread of TB is occurring. In areas with high buffalo herd TB prevalence, up to 90% of the lions in the corresponding areas are infected.

Vaccination is the control measure of choice but an effective wildlife vaccine does not currently exist. In the KNP and surrounding private reserves, it is hoped that buffalo and lions will adapt to TB through the natural selection of more resistant individuals although this may take generations.





## GPS Tracking of a White-headed Vulture in the Olifants River Private Nature Reserve by Kerri Wolter

Since April 2019, VulPro has been tracking the movements of an adult White-headed Vulture in the area around the Olifants River Private Game Reserve. This bird was tagged with the yellow patagial tag “408” and fitted with a GPS tracking device. We have thus been able to track the bird’s movements and have analysed the data that we have been able to get from the last year. Using the data, we are able to understand this bird’s movement ecology. We are also able to determine that this vulture appears to be nesting in the area, as the majority of its time was spent in a certain area during the breeding season.



From this information, we will be able to better understand how these birds move in their habitats and how they use their habitats to survive. We will also be able to use the information to understand where these birds should be moving and breeding for future studies.

These results are only preliminary as we will be able to incorporate the next year’s worth of data in the next month, giving us more robust results. The results of this study are currently being written up by the VulPro research team, and we look forward to publishing the completed paper in a peer-reviewed journal in the coming months.

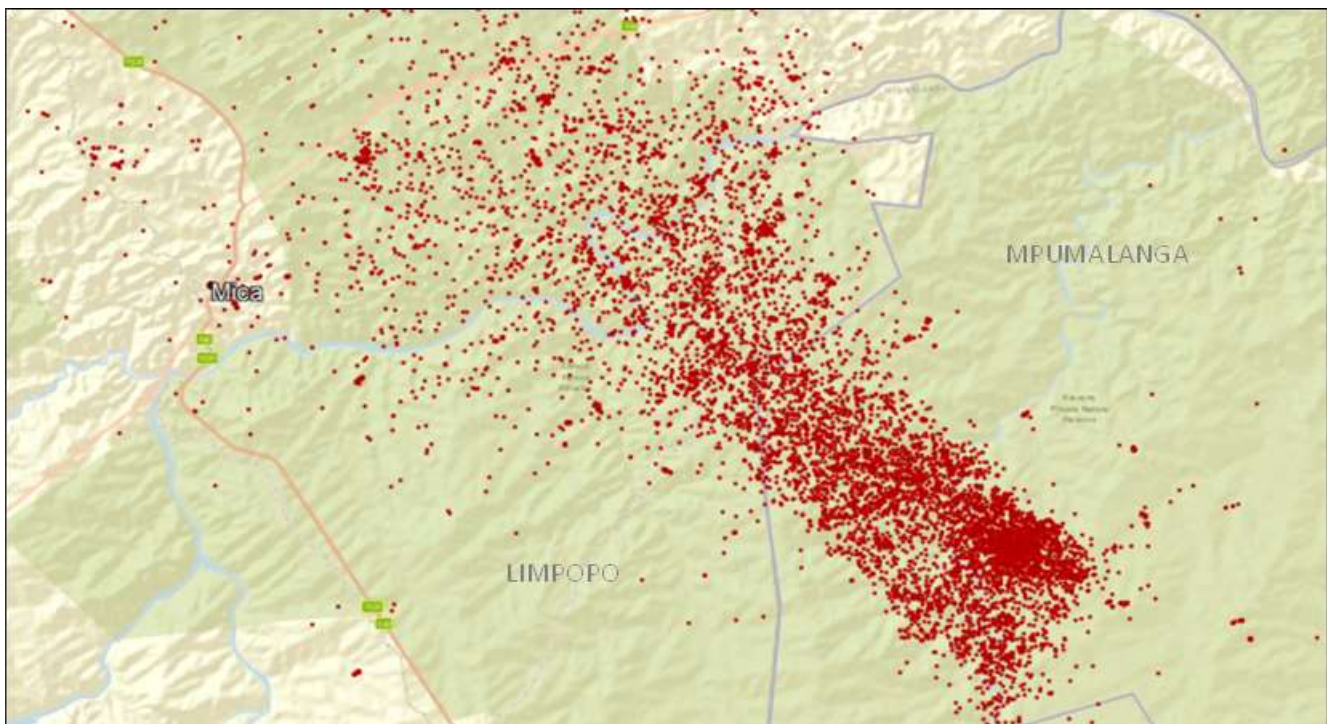


Figure 1: Map of the points recorded by the GPS tracking device fitted to White-headed Vulture, 408, in the Olifants River Private Game Reserve and the surrounding areas from April 2019 until March 2020.

## REACHING OUT

This month, we start off with fantastic news from John Anderson, Balule Trust: "I am delighted to inform you that our Trust 2020 matric bursary students both did exceptionally well in the I.E.B. matriculation exams. Loenie Wiltshire obtained 3 Distinctions and over 70% for 3 of the other 4 subjects that she wrote. She was accepted to study Civil Engineering at both UCT and UP and has decided to go to UP for financial reasons. Kgaphy Mathole obtained two distinctions and has been accepted at UJ to study Accounting.

Both of these persons come from hugely disadvantaged backgrounds, which makes their achievements all the more spectacular! The staff at Southern Cross School are to be congratulated on playing such an important role in their secondary education. I think that we can be well satisfied that the money we invested in these two was well spent."

### Staff Library

We are starting up a library for our ORGR staff and their visiting children. This will be located within the staff village and will operate on a 'trust' basis, in that there is no librarian appointed and books are signed in and out by the person taking the book/s.

We ask members to donate books they no longer use, particularly wildlife stories, textbooks (including language, science, maths, geography, etc) for pre-school upwards, educational magazines (National Geographic etc) and jigsaw puzzles/board games. Thanks to those who have already contributed. Any queries, please call Susan Harwood on 0832282546.

### Donations Received

An enormous thank you to all those who have donated dry macs, raincoats, and waterproof ponchos – the first batch of which have been handed over to the SAME Foundation to protect learners and their books from the elements. We are now collecting more rainwear for Maseke children. Although the rainy season is almost over, the children will be prepared for the next year's downpours and the jacket types will serve well as windcheaters for winter. This month, we are donating books, puzzles, a brand new walking frame, a new nebulizer, and a large stock of vitamins to the clinic and school in Sigagule. The wheelchair we received from St Stithians College a while ago has finally been gifted to a 100-year-old Gogo in the area, who has been unable to walk for some time now. It has changed her life!



In closing, please remember the recent call-to- action by the Balule Trust to assist in raising funds as the virulent virus continues, to support the less fortunate by supplying them with food parcels.

### The Balule Trust Banking details:

First National Bank (FNB) Bryanston

Account number: 62336787877

Clearing code: 250-017

Swift Number: FIRNZA JJXXX

Please reference EFT Payments with your name.



# MEMBERS UPDATE

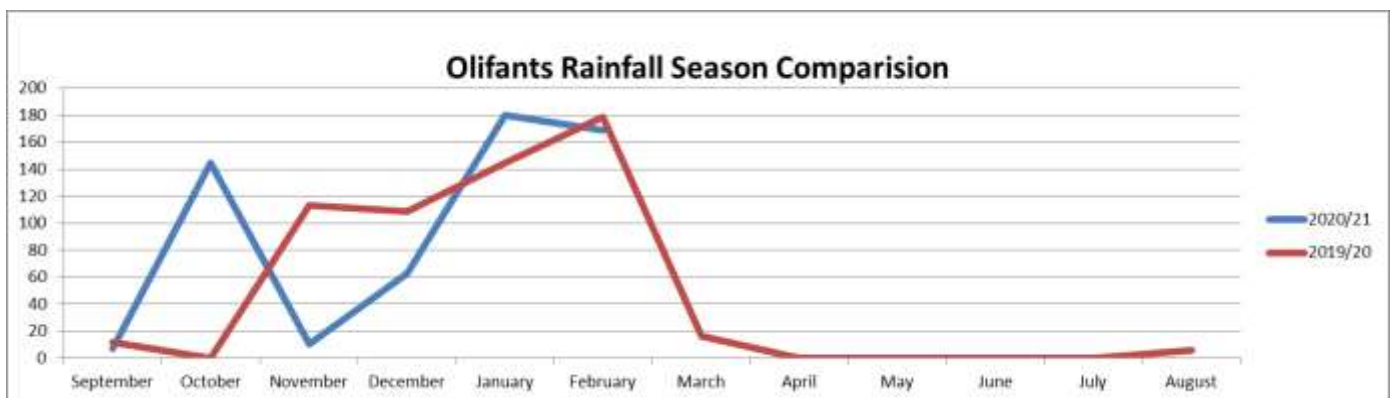
## THE WEATHER REPORT

Rainfall for February has come in at 169mm with the season totalling at 574.5mm, compared to 557.5mm for the same time last year. The majority of the 169mm received fell in four events during the month with one incredible cloudburst delivering 36mm in a mere 30 minutes. Cloudbursts, are a sudden, very heavy rainfall, usually local in nature and of brief duration and most occur in connection with thunderstorms. In these storms, there are violent uprushes of air, which at times prevents the condensing raindrops from falling to the ground. A large amount of water may thus accumulate at high levels, and if the upward currents are weakened the whole of this water falls at one time.



The long-term forecast indicates that southern Africa will still receive goods rains during March and into April.

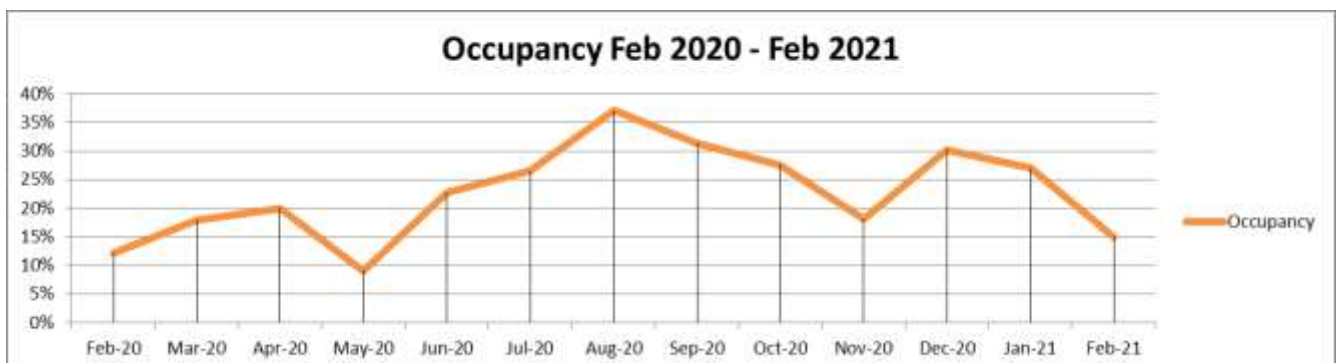
*Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season*



Temperatures in February have been fairly mild with the mercury breaking the 30 degrees mark only for four days. Average daytime temperatures have been around 27 degrees and a low average of 18 degrees.

## OCCUPANCY

February ended off with an average occupancy of 15% compared to 12% at the same time last year. The month started off fairly busy, with 17 units in residence - and ended off with around 28 units on the reserve towards the end of February. Midmonth saw a dip in occupancies with only six units in residence. The annual average occupancy remains at 23% for the last year.



## OUR FEBRUARY NIGHT SKY

In a nutshell...

### Moon

Date	Time	Phase
06/03	03h30	Last Quarter
13/03	12h21	New Moon
21/03	16h40	First Quarter
28/03	20h48	Full Moon

### Moon – Earth Relations

Perigee: 360 309 km on the 30/03 at 08h16

Apogee: 405 253 km on the 18/03 at 07h03

### Sun – Earth Relations

Vernal equinox: on the 20th of March at 11h37

### Planet Visibility

Mars (near Taurus) visible in the evening sky

Mercury, Jupiter and Saturn are visible in the morning sky, near Capricornus

### Meteor Showers

Gamma Normids: active from the 25th of February to the 20th of March (peak on the 13th of March)

Delta Pavonids: active from the 11th of March to the 16th of April (peak on the 6th of April)

## ORGR GIN

We are excited to advise that our Olifants River Game Reserve Craft Gin continues to turn heads, quench many thirsts at sunset and has performed well this season. We are rapidly depleting stocks of the 720 bottles we ordered and took delivery of in September 2020!

We are therefore doing a “sense check” to see if we should order a further batch of gin for our shop, remembering that a percentage of each bottle goes into our fund-raising coffers to support our anti-poaching unit in their endeavours to take care of our rhino. We would therefore appreciate an initial gauge on advance orders for us to minimize the risk of placing a further order without at least taking some insurance on your appetite to continue with this valuable initiative. To this end, we kindly request all members to complete the attached order form and send to Lorenza so we can review the feasibility of the project. Your input would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your amazing efforts and support thus far!

### **Some easy to identify bright stars**

Rigel: blue supergiant in Orion

Betelgeuse: red supergiant in Orion

Procyon: yellowish white star in Canis Minor

Sirius: brightest star in the night sky, located in Canis Major

Antares: red supergiant in Scorpius

Arcturus: red giant in Boötes

Spica: brightest bluish-white star in Virgo

Canopus: yellowish-white star in Carina

Altair: a white star, brightest in Aquila

Regulus: blue-white star and the brightest star in Leo

The Pointers: Alpha and Beta Centauri





## Olifants Campfire Stories

In the spirit of community, we invite members and staff to submit their favourite Olifants stories (current and dating back over the years) for possible inclusion into each newsletter. The aim is to share

uplifting/exciting/fun/educational/interesting experiences within our beautiful reserve, which you feel will entertain or inspire our ORGR family and others. We may select some of these to be featured on our website to highlight and showcase how privileged we are to be custodians of this incredibly special place. Positivity is the key here! Pictures which may enhance the story are welcome too. Please note

that all submissions will be subject to editing. Send your entries via email to Susan Harwood (<mailto:harwoods@netactive.co.za>). We look forward to hearing from you and to building a memorable collection of accounts in this unique part of wild Africa.



## Covid Case at Olifants River Game Reserve

As most of you already know from staff-member communications, Errol contracted Covid-19 on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February. Thankfully, he has made a full recovery and is as strong as a buffalo again! As soon as the infection was confirmed, Errol went into quarantine and during the following few days, we tested all the staff with whom he'd had direct contact. Luckily no one else was infected including Lourenza and their children. By the 21<sup>th</sup> of February, after all staff were cleared as being Covid-free, the team was back at work. Thank you for the support received during this worrying time.

## New Rhino Monitoring Number

Please note that the number to report White Rhinos to has changed. Please use this number (060 638 5080) to report all your White Rhino sightings, including location, sex, number, horn status, and any identifiable ear notches. The data received from members is vital information that the team requires and we thank all those who contribute.

## Game Drive and Sightings Etiquette

Just a short reminder to all members on a few points whilst on a game drive, to ensure we all have the best experience possible out there and the wildlife is considered at all times.

1. Please keep your voices down at sightings to ensure fellow members and the wildlife are not being disturbed.
2. Do not stand up while at a sighting, this can break the outline of the vehicle and disturb the animals, especially at close proximity.
3. Please keep a reasonable distance from the wildlife at a sighting.
4. Please share your sightings on the radio so we can all enjoy these magic moments.

## New Team-member Profile

This month we would like to introduce you all to our newest employee at Olifants River Game Reserve. Meet Tiya, who recently joined our APU team in the capacity of Trainee Tracker. Her name means “energy” in Tsonga and she certainly lives up to it.

Tiya was born in the small town of Komga in the eastern Cape where her parents (Redtick Coonhounds) work as bushbuck trackers on a farm. Since birth, she always had the feeling that she was destined for bigger things and at the young age of 12 weeks made her way to Limpopo by air and by road. After a long journey of 1423km, she landed on our doorstep at ORGR. Tiya will spend the next six months learning the ‘ins and outs’ of living on a game reserve, paying specific attention to knowing which creatures bite back and which are too big to tango with. At eight months old, she will be packing her bags and heading off the boarding school at the Southern African Wildlife College to receive the very best K9 Tracking training in the country. This will take place over an eight month period, where she will return home to her teammates in the ORGR Anti-poaching Unit as a fully-fledged K9 Man Tracker!

Tiya’s ambition in life is to one day (just like her Uncle Jan), be an expert tracker of poachers and her main aim is to protect the rhinos in the Greater Kruger Park - a dream I am certain she will achieve. By the time her Uncle Jan is ready to retire, Tiya will be in a position to take on the responsibility of being our lead K9 tracker. Her hobbies are demolishing shoes with her needle-sharp teeth, eating lion dung and exploring the reserve with her handler Callan. She has fitted in well with the rest of the team and we all wish her a long, successful career with us. Welcome Tiya!



## FINAL WORD

That’s all for this month and we hope to see you all on the reserve soon. In the meantime, stay safe and healthy! I will leave you with this little nugget of wisdom in the form of an African proverb: “The world is not ours, the earth is not ours, it’s a treasure we hold in trust for the future generations.”

Catch you on Sunset Plains for a sundowner...

Best Regards

**Nick, the management team  
& staff**

