



## ORGR BUSH TELEGRAPH

### *THE JUNE 2021 EDITION*

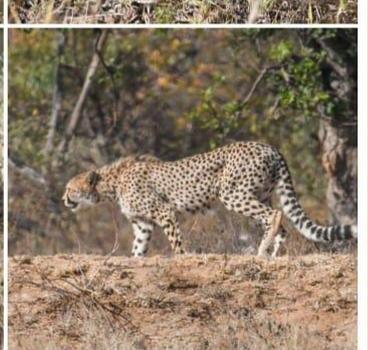


**Hello Olifants Community!**

We hope you are all keeping healthy and safe during this third wave of Covid infections and wish a speedy recovery to those Olifants family members who have been affected. We are halfway through the year already and midway through winter, with the shortest day and longest night approaching on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June. Kerry and I also celebrate our two years of being part of the ORGR community on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June. It has been an incredible ride so far!

## THE GAME DRIVE

The winter game viewing is in full swing with excellent sightings being experienced on the reserve. A very large crocodile has moved into Double Dam and he has taken a couple of impala as prey. Two cheetahs have spent a substantial amount of time on the reserve, with regular sightings for at least the last month. They have been moving between Sunset, Buffalo, and Sable Plains. Leopard sightings have been excellent with lion sightings a little quieter than usual, which explains the presence of the cheetah. General game viewing is still very good with great sightings of kudu, giraffe, warthog, zebras, wildebeest and many more. Elephant numbers have increased in the area due to the availability of water and a large tusker is being seen around the Big Dam area. The latter dam seems to be the place of frequent action!



# Creature Feature: Serval (*Leptailurus serval*)

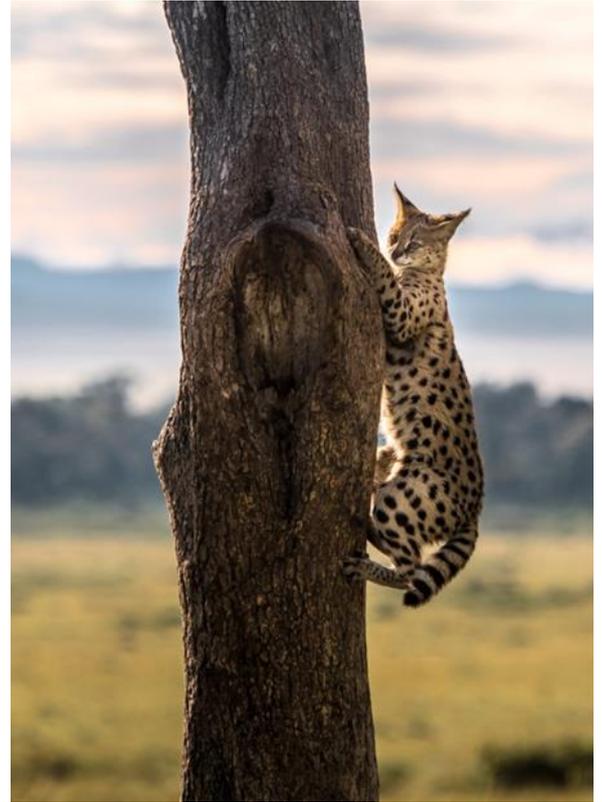
*Africa Geographic*

Across the runways of Paris, New York and Milan, supermodels parade the latest fashions draped across their slender frames. With steely looks and pronounced cheekbones, these young and glamorous walking clothes horses are, in theory at least, the pinnacle of human attractiveness. Yet for all the effort that goes into achieving this particular look, there is an African cat that effortlessly achieves the same effect: the serval.

The striking servals that stalk the savannahs, plains, wetlands, and forests of Africa bear a certain similarity to these leggy models, sporting a matching kind of composed elegance. These servals are, in essence, the ultimate masters of the catwalk (and stalk and leap and pounce).

## INTRODUCTION

The serval (*Leptailurus serval*) is a medium-sized cat that looks somewhat like a cross between a small cheetah and a large house cat. In reality, they belong to the “caracal lineage” of the Felidae family, along with caracals and African golden cats, though their peculiar shapes, spotted colouration and missing ear tufts set them apart from the other two species. Servals have the longest legs in proportion to their bodies of any of the cat species (hence the model comparison) and a tawny-gold coat dotted with a mixture of spots and stripes. Like caracals, their tails are relatively short in comparison to other cat species. There are rare sightings of melanistic servals, particularly in East Africa, and leucistic individuals have been born in captivity.



Though the serval is the only member of its genus, there are currently three proposed subspecies recognized by the IUCN's Cat Specialist Group: *L.s. serval* of Southern Africa, *L. s. lipostictus* of East Africa and *L. s. constantina* of Central and West Africa. These distinctions, however, are based mostly on the trend observed within other African cats, rather than genetic analysis, and may change as further research comes to light.

Solitary and silent, servals are seldom seen but surprisingly widely distributed across a range of habitats in most of sub-Saharan Africa. There are also some small and isolated populations scattered in North Africa – specifically in Morocco and Tunisia. As a general rule, servals are not fond of arid areas. They prefer wetter habitats where rodents tend to be densely populated, with the exception being the central tropical rainforests of Africa, where they are notably absent.

## THE POUNCE

The lanky limbs of the serval are not only useful in navigating long grass and dense wetland vegetation, but they confer the serval's most well-known ability – a gravity-defying leap. The extended metatarsal bones and elongated and unusually mobile toes provide the perfect attachment points for a complex arrangement of tendons and muscles that store and release elastic energy. The result is that servals have been recorded leaping close to 3m straight up and 4m forwards, occasionally snatching hapless birds out of the air at the same time.

Aided by this penchant for pouncing, servals are exceedingly proficient hunters. While current research indicates that the diminutive black-footed cat holds the highest hunting success rate of any member of the cat family, the serval vies closely for the top spot. Studies conducted in Tanzania indicate that some servals have a hunting success rate of over 60%, with the possibility that this number is closer to 80% when only rodents are considered.

## THE HUNT

The secret to this success lies in the serval's hunting strategy. They are consummate ambush predators that use their massive, radar-like ears to detect the smallest movements of anything from rodents, insects and reptiles to birds and antelope lambs. Prey detected; the serval stealthily moves into a spring-loaded crouch, frozen until the time is right to launch an attack with legs drawn up to their chests and descending upon unsuspecting victims from

above. Anything that manages to dodge this aerial assault is rapidly chased down in long strides. Snakes require a more combative approach, with lightning-fast blows from the forepaws dispatching them from a comfortable distance.

This particular strategy is most effective at night, and servals are described as primarily nocturnal. However, they are equally comfortable utilizing the daylight hours, particularly in the early mornings and at dusk. When large kills are made, servals have been observed caching the carcasses, hiding them beneath leaves and grasses.

### THE SEXES

The serval social structure and territory layout is not dissimilar to that of leopards, albeit over smaller home ranges of 10-32km<sup>2</sup>. Both males and females mark and defend territorial boundaries against members of the same sex, though physical confrontations seem to be quite rare. The territories of the males are larger than those of the females, and one male's range may overlap the ranges of several females. Territory size and serval density are dependent on the resources available to them. When the habitat is suitable, and prey is abundant, the territories will be smaller in size and the population density will be higher. The males and females generally only associate when the female is in oestrus, a state that she advertises through increased urination and repeated vocalizations.

### THE THREATS

Naturally, the main anthropogenic threat to servals is the constant degradation and loss of suitable habitats, particularly wetlands and grasslands. Fortunately, however, servals have proved to be highly adaptable and appear to be more tolerant of disturbed landscapes than many other mammal species. Recent research seems to indicate that the highest density of servals anywhere in Africa is in Secunda, South Africa, in the buffer zones surrounding a coal liquefaction plant where they prey on the abundant rodent population.

To a lesser extent, trade in serval skins poses a particular threat to the servals of North and Central Africa. At the same time, in West Africa, their parts are used for ceremonial and medicinal purposes. Rural pastoralists may also target servals as a potential threat to livestock.

For now, however, the serval is listed on the IUCN Red List as "Least Concern", though the populations north of the Sahara are considered to be "Critically Endangered". These northern populations are primarily isolated to Morocco, though servals were reintroduced to Feijda National Park in Tunisia. While servals were once recorded in Algeria, fears are that they are now extinct there. Servals are highly adaptable and are found in most sub-Saharan habitats, preying on a variety of species.

### THE PETS

Over recent decades, the serval has seen a surge in popularity as an exotic pet, and the first savanna cat (an occasionally fertile hybrid between a serval and domestic cat) was bred in 1986. Most countries have strict regulations around keeping wild animals as pets, but in areas where such restrictions are more relaxed, exotic breeders have flourished.

While fortunately, the breeders supply most of the pet trade without significant impact on wild populations, there are practical and ethical realities to keeping a serval as a pet. Slender they may be, but a serval is an immensely powerful animal that can weigh close to 20kg and live for 22 years. Most importantly, their wild instincts are imprinted from birth. While pet sites are full of testimonials about how servals make wonderful, almost dog-like pets, the various rescue centres now home to abandoned, "troublesome" adult servals tell a vastly different story. It is unaccountably cruel to breed an animal genetically programmed to stalk the wilds of Africa and put it in a harness or cage as a status symbol and ego-boost.

### CONCLUSION

For those looking to see an elusive serval where it truly belongs – in the wild – there is good news. Over recent years, serval sightings are becoming increasingly common as more time and effort has been put into understanding their movements. For a fortunate few, this has resulted in astoundingly intimate glimpses into the lives of one of Africa's most graceful cats.



# CONSERVATION

## Rhino News

The white rhino population in Balule has welcomed five new calves this year which is incredible news for the species on the reserve. Black rhinos are still doing exceptionally well on our landscape with the population remaining stable.

Both black and white rhinos have been dehorned in Balule and Klaserie alike, ensuring that there is less interest in our wild rhinos by the criminal element.

Please remember to report all of your rhino sightings for monitoring with a location, date/time and a photo if possible.



## Security Update

Two years ago, Balule Nature Reserve was the poorest performing reserve in terms of anti-poaching and has now gained recognition as the best protected in the APNR in the fight against rhino poaching. This is largely due to the efforts that ORGR has put into securing not only our reserve but the greater Balule as well. Rhinos are falling in all reserves at the moment and we cannot let our guard down. We dealt with an incursion a few weeks back which was a stark reminder that this problem is far from over.

Our AI-enabled camera network detected three poachers entering the reserve, which led to a two-day long operation in pursuit of these criminals. Sadly we did not have the opportunity to apprehend them but the efforts put into the follow-up both night and day pressured the poachers into a hasty retreat, literally running out of the reserve at pace. We presented a formidable front using all the tools available and in this case, managed to turn this gang around with empty pockets ...a great success! They will be back to try their luck again, make no mistake.

Our young K9 Tiya recently achieved her level 1 qualification at the age of 7 months. The assessment had her follow a 1-hour old scent trail over a distance of 5km with multiple road crossings. Johan van Straaten, the K9 master who assessed her, indicated that Tiya is one of the best performing young K9 he has seen. Very exciting times ahead with this hound!



## Erosion Control

This year we have been focusing heavily on erosion control throughout the reserve. We have installed multiple gabions in strategic areas to prevent both erosions on the roads and at sensitive sites in the bush. The Sable plains erosion site has been completed with a series of gabions installed along the eroded areas and the erosion heads have been packed with rock to prevent further spread. We will be moving into certain sensitive areas in Lisbon next.



## Alien Plant Control

We have made a last push for the season to tackle cocklebur around the dams and the river. Vast tracks of this invasive species has been removed this year. We have tackled a few rouge prickly pears along the way as well.

## Water Meter Installations

An important function of conservation is understanding the amount of water we extract from the underground reservoirs. Water is a very scarce commodity and we need to ensure we protect this precious resource. ORGR will be installing water meters at all boreholes to start recording how much we are extracting from the ground. This will enable us to understand where we stand with sustainable water usage and adopt usage protocols to ensure we have a viable source for years to come.

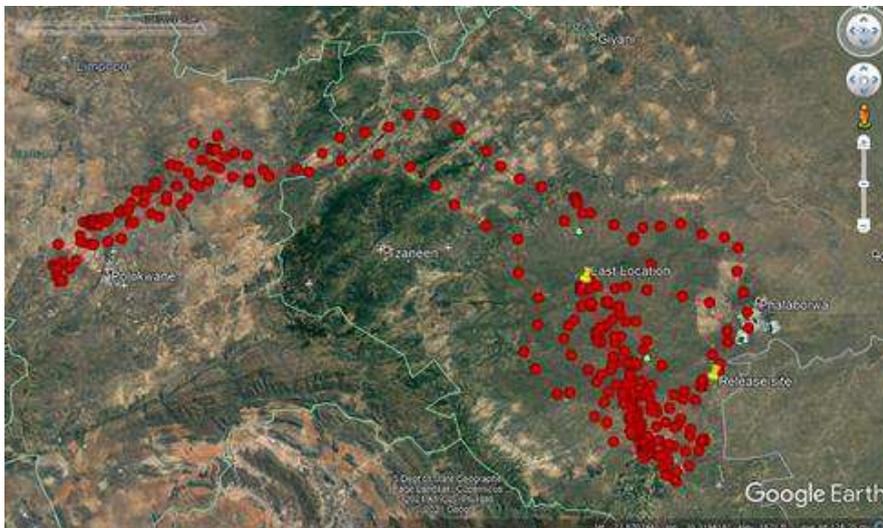


## Vulture Release

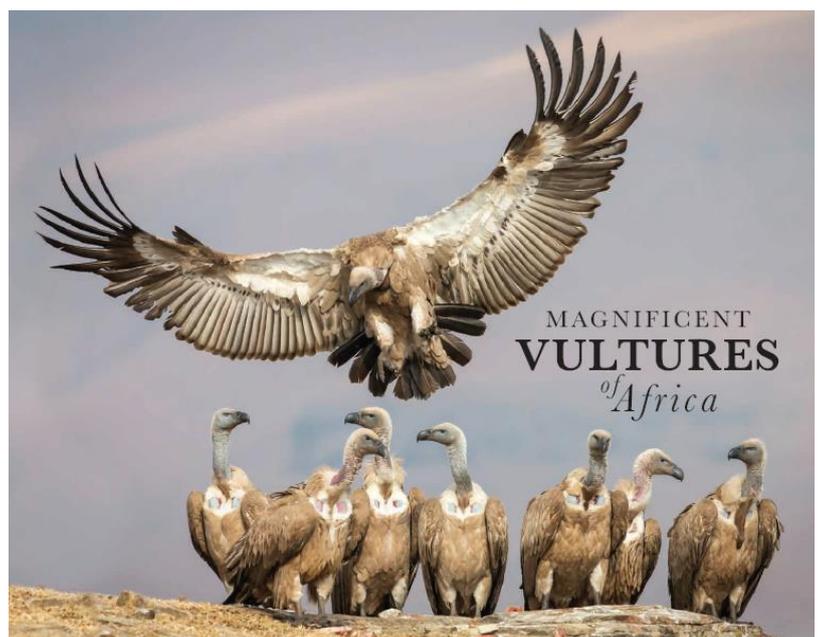
The African White-backed vulture which was captured at ORGR due to a plastic pipe stuck around its neck and beak in May, was successfully treated and released by VulPro, back inside the ORGR on 1 June 2021. He was fitted with a Safring metal leg band, a coloured leg band (green/white 78) for visual resightings and with a pelvic mounted GPS tracking device. This technology allows one the opportunity to monitor the bird's survival, its movement and foraging range, all aiding important data for this critically endangered species.

Below is a map showing the full range of movements so far for this individual. As one can see, almost immediately after the release, Mr P (as named by Sandy and Graham De Wit of Unit 4), left the safety of ORGR and travelled as far as Polokwane. During Mr P's adventure, he visited the Ibis Piggery's vulture restaurant and enjoyed a pork meal before turning around for home. We are thrilled that he has come back to the safety of Balule again, given that White-backed vultures spend 80% of their time outside protected areas and thus often making it difficult to look after this species.

We look forward to keeping you updated on Mr P's progress and movements.



VulPro is proud to offer you the first-ever dedicated vulture coffee table book for purchase at the ORGR offices. The hardcover book is slightly smaller than an A3 sized book and boasts 70 pages of incredible photography, showcasing the magnificence of vultures by some of South Africa's leading photographers. "The Magnificence of Vultures" is a tribute to the beauty of Africa's vultures and VulPro, together with the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, has put together a book that truly portrays vultures as they so rightly deserve to be viewed. It provides just the right amount of information on each species with a dedication to VulPro and the work they undertake on a daily basis to save our vulture species so they continue to grace our skies now ... and into the future.



## REACHING OUT

As many of you may know, an account of our support to Maseke and Sigagule communities was featured in the Kruger2Canyon newspaper recently. The story covered a visit to both those areas on Friday 23rd April, by Nick Leuenberger, John Anderson, Peter Eastwood and Susan Harwood. A substantial donation, for which we are truly grateful, to the trust was made by the Tanglewood Foundation for upliftment projects in both areas.

COMMUNITY NEWS 28 MAY 2021 Kruger2Canyon 8

### The Balule Outreach Programme makes it's mark



**Nick Leuenberger, Member of Olifants Game Reserve introduces "K2 Page" the Water Day to the children at the SAME Foundation's Care Centre in Sigagule**

**John Anderson, Founder of SAME Foundation's Care Centre in Sigagule**

**Henry reading before the start at the Care Centre created by the SAME Foundation (South African Medical Expenditure) Foundation in Sigagule**

**Susan Harwood**  
Community Centre to catch up and donate various much-needed stationery, vitamins, masks, puzzles, balls, warm clothing, blankets, and school shoes. The incredible work done, particularly by the SAME Foundation is truly beyond words, and Bags of Love (Johannesburg) charity founded by Susan Harwood is proud to support this organisation and honoured to contribute to the Trust.

**Nick Leuenberger, warden of Olifants River Game Reserve, Peter Eastwood of Tanglewood Foundation, John Anderson of the Balule Outreach Trust and Susan Harwood, board member of Olifants River Game Reserve and Trustee of the Trust, visited the SAME Foundation (headed by Shirley-Anne Beretta) situated in Sigagule and the Maseke Drop In Community Centre to catch up and donate various much-needed stationery, vitamins, masks, puzzles, balls, warm clothing, blankets, and school shoes. The incredible work done, particularly by the SAME Foundation is truly beyond words, and Bags of Love (Johannesburg) charity founded by Susan Harwood is proud to support this organisation and honoured to contribute to the Trust.**

**John Anderson, says "From small beginnings in 2013, the Balule Outreach Trust has established a firm relationship over several years with our two major beneficiaries – funding of Burnary students at Southern Cross School in Hoedspruit and South African Medical Expenditures (SAME) through their After School Child Care Centre in Sigagule Village".**

**"The Trust is totally committed to fulfilling their aims and vision of continued community development programs"**

**Covid-19 has, without warning, brought with it different challenges for which solutions have been urgently sought and the Trust is currently concentrating on providing funds for much-needed food, masks, and sanitation within the communities. In addition to SAME we are supporting Nourish, an NPO operating in Sigagule with funds for making masks, and the Apostolic Faith Mission and the Maseke Community with funds for food parcels, both of whom operate in communities within the Phalaborwa region.**

**The Trust is well on its way to accomplishing some of our ever-evolving aims, but there is much still to be done. Your valuable support is the lifeline that determines our success, both now and into the future. Those interested in providing financial support to the Trust can do so by donating into their account, details as follows:**

**The Balule Outreach Trust**  
First National Bank (FNB), Bryanston, South Africa  
Account number: 6223 678 7877  
7877 Clearing Code: 250-017  
Swift number: FIRNZA1000  
Please reference EFT payments with your name.

We also thank all members who have donated gently-used and new English dictionaries for the literacy programme at SAME Foundation. We received a large contribution of 60 such books from a Johannesburger who wishes to remain anonymous – and a number of dictionaries from various sources continue to roll in!

Thank you to all members who have taken part in the winter warmth drive for blankets, warm shoes and winter clothing. We received in the region of 30 pairs of warm shoes and 80 pairs of Toughies school shoes for learners at the SAME Foundation was donated in Johannesburg. An overwhelming example of generosity.

The Winter Warmth drive continues – and as we are still in the grip of the virulent virus claiming many lives, we need to bring comfort by way of warm clothing and blankets for the less fortunate folk in the surrounding communities. These can be dropped off at the ORGR for Lourenza's attention or for those in Johannesburg, you are welcome to drop these items off with Susan Harwood in Dainfern.



Should your wish to join our WhatsApp Outreach Group, simply message Susan on 0832282546.

Those wishing to contribute to the upliftment and wellbeing of the less fortunate communities close by, herewith banking details :

The Balule Outreach Trust  
FNB Bryanston  
Account Number: 622336787877  
Clearing code: 250-017  
Kindly reference donations with your name.

In closing, this month we are sending best wishes to John Anderson, Founder of the Balule Outreach Trust and his wife Jenny who both contracted Covid in recent weeks. We are also sending best wishes to Shirley-Anne Beretta of the SAME Foundation, following a neck operation.

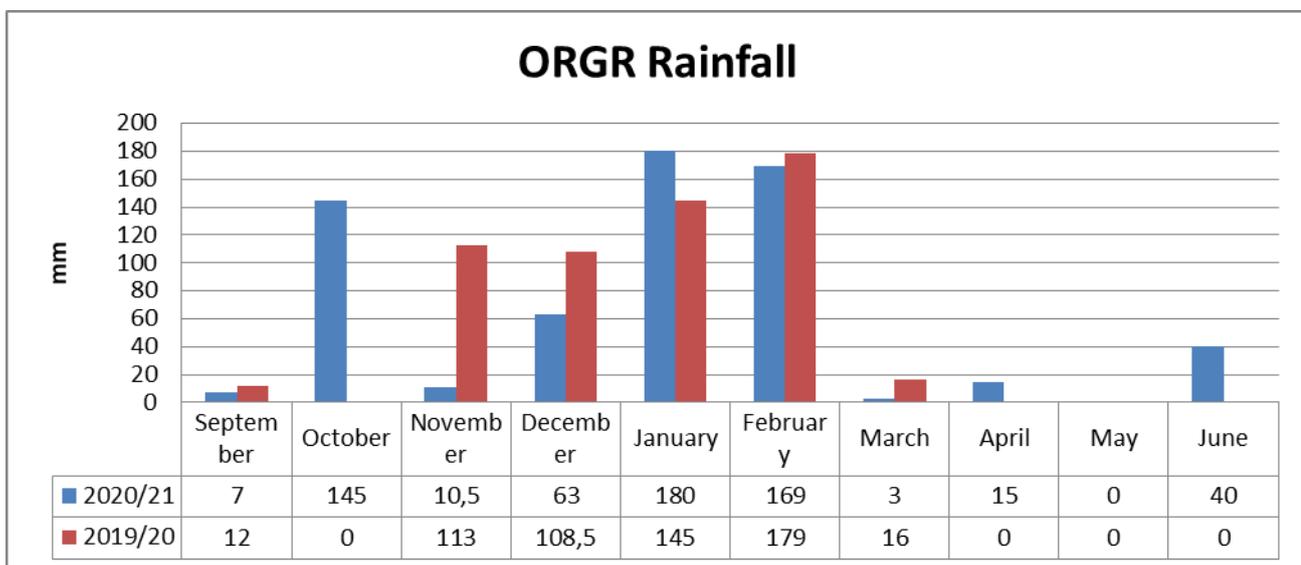
# MEMBERS UPDATE

## THE WEATHER REPORT

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is currently in a neutral state and the forecast indicates that it will most likely remain in a neutral state for the whole of the winter and spring seasons. The influence of ENSO on South Africa is however very limited during the winter season and is not expected to have a major impact on southern African weather systems on a seasonal timescale at this time.

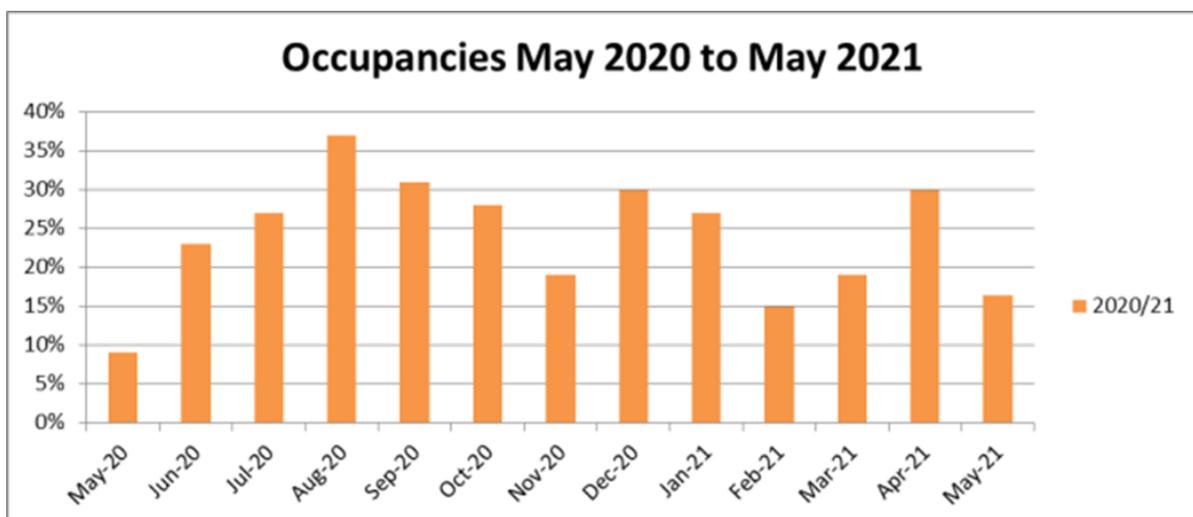
We have been through a cooler spell in the last week with temperatures dropping to 8 degrees and not exceeding 20 degrees during the day. We have been pleasantly surprised with a 40 mm downpour of rain at the beginning of June which pushed our rainfall total for the year to 632,5 mm. This extra winter rain has been very welcome to settle the dust on the reserve and has allowed us an opportunity to work on the roads using the wet conditions to our advantage

*Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season*



## OCCUPANCY

May ended off with an average occupancy of 16%, one of our quietest months of the year. We peaked at 21 units in residence and our quietest day saw nine units occupied. Our annual average for the past year remains high at 24%.



## OUR JUNE NIGHT SKY

In a nutshell...

### Moon

Date	Time	Phase
02/06	09h24	Last
10/06	12h52	New
18/06	05h54	First
24/06	20h39	Full Moon

### Moon – Earth Relations

Perigee: 359 956 km on the 23/06 at 11h54  
Apogee: 406 228 km on the 08/06 at 04h27

### Planet Visibility

Mars is visible in the evening sky, near Gemini at the beginning of June and near Cancer at the end of the month

Venus is visible after sunset, near Taurus

Mercury is visible on the horizon after sunset, near Taurus, in early June, and before sunrise, near Taurus, late in the month

Jupiter is visible in the morning sky, near Aquarius\

Saturn is visible in the morning sky, near Capricornus

### Meteor Showers

theta Ophiuchids: active from the 8th of June to the 16th of June (peaking on the 13th of June)  
June Lyrics active from the 11th of June to the 21st of June (peaking on the 16th of June)

### 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



## Staff Accommodation and Rhino Pan

The staff accommodation upgrades and new block build are going well and we look forward to opening these units up to the staff in late August. The Rhino pan project is moving along quite nicely with the new deck being laid this week and most of the bathroom conversion work already completed. We aim to have this facility back in action by the end of June/beginning of July.



## Andy's Lookout

Andy's Lookout has phenomenal views of the reserve and the Olifants River – and is a firm favourite for sundowners. We will be installing a simple table and roof cover structure at this site in the near future to make this spot more comfortable to use.

## Use of LED Vehicle-mounted spotlights

Please note the use of vehicle-mounted LED spotlights and LED lightbars are not permitted on the game viewers to aid nighttime viewing. Not only are these bright spotlights a disturbance to wildlife but they are very disturbing to other members on a game drive.

Please refer to point 10 of the [Game Viewing Vehicle Policy for Vehicles](#): *The use of single or multiple row LED light bars, whether bumper or canopy mounted, is strictly forbidden. Any such devices already fitted, are to be removed. Conventional bumper-mounted spotlights are permitted but only if they illuminate in combination with the standard high beam lighting of the vehicle.*

## New Vehicle Decals

The new decals for game viewers bearing the new logo are ready and available at the office. We have two options: one with a white background and the other with a transparent background. They look fantastic!

## New signage

We have updated most of the signage at the office, workshop and carpools. The signs look great and are a vast improvement from the old green signs they replaced.

## Covid-19 Reminders

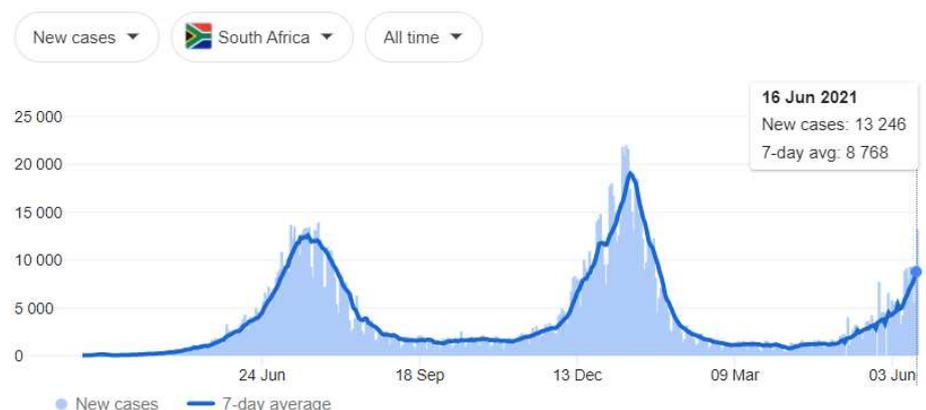
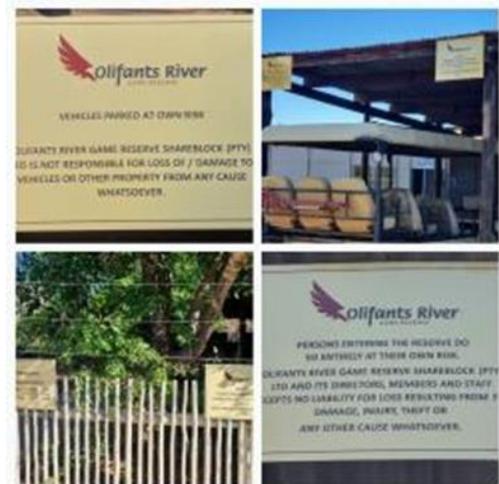
The country is entering its third wave of Covid-19 infections and we have had multiple cases of this virulent virus on the reserve. We ask all members who are visiting the reserve to be mindful of the protocols below and inform the office immediately if you have been tested positive or you show symptoms of Covid-19.

### Masks must be worn in all public areas.

Please ensure you wear a mask in all public areas and when interacting with other members, guests and staff. A mask must be worn when the housekeeping staff are in your unit cleaning, when you are in residence. Your mask must also be worn when interacting with office and workshop staff and management. Social distancing of at least two meters is to be adhered to at all times.

### Office access to members

A limit of one vehicle is to enter the office parking at any time – and only two people may enter the office buildings simultaneously (after sanitising their hands at the entrance). The rest of the vehicle occupants are to please remain outside or in the vehicle. Office visits should be as expedient as possible in order to grant other visitors the opportunity to shop and settle accounts etc.



## Staff Member of the Month

This month we focus on Kerry Leuenberger, who is responsible for all the financial functions, administration and human resources of Olifants River Game Reserve. This is Kerry in her own words:

*"I was born in the UK, my folks moved back to South Africa and settled in Durban. After matriculating from Danville Park Girls High I went to ML Sultan Hotel School and completed a Diploma in Hotel Management, spending time in the Drakensburg, Port Elizabeth, the WildCoast and Umhlanga Sands.*

*In 1996 I experienced bush life for the first time at Bongani Mountain Lodge. It was an adjustment moving from the fast pace of hotel life to a very different way of the bush but I fell in love with it and never looked back. A different focus of hospitality then took me to Singita which will always hold a special place in my heart. A move away from administration to a more guest-focused position took me into the Kruger Concession of Imbali. Initially, I wasn't sure of the move but they say that things happen for a reason ... and the reason for going to Imbali was to fall in love again. This time with my husband, Nick.*

*Our adventures together took us out of Kruger and up to Thornybush to run the tented Chapungu camp. The time was then right and the stars aligned to head to the ultimate in the Game Lodge industry and move to Botswana. We ran three of Wilderness Safari's top camps over five years from the far northern Namibian border to deep in the Okavango Delta until we felt a call to come home to get married.*

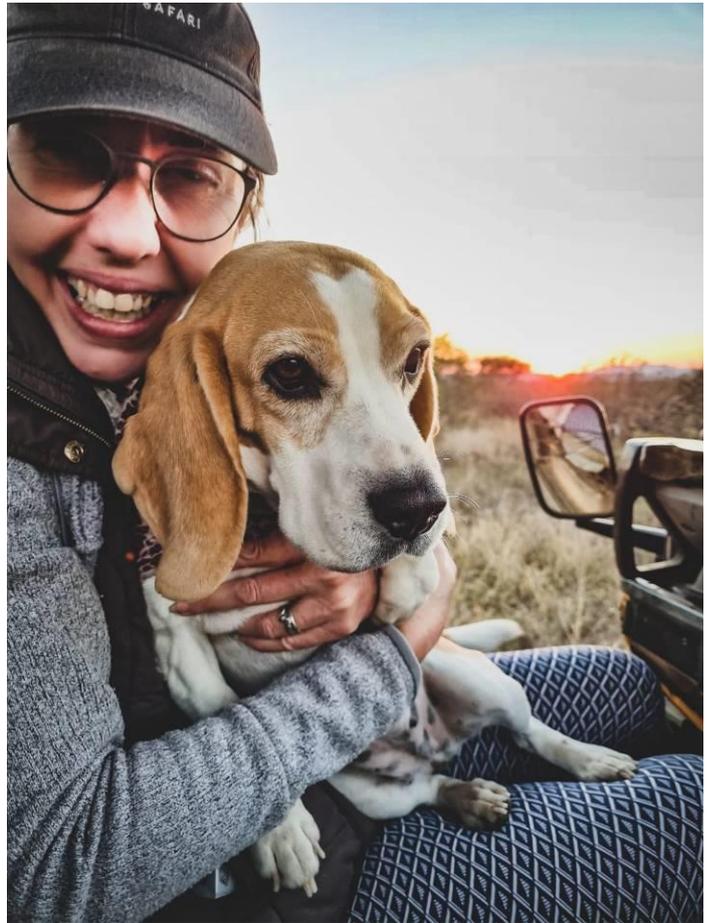
*We were welcomed into the Moore family and back into Kruger on the Lion Sands Concession. Running the Concession we worked closely with Kruger and learned a lot about how close the science of nature and passion for wildlife work so closely together to run the small country that is the Kruger National Park.*

*As much as we love the Lowveld, the giant wilderness of the Okavango was calling. An opportunity for a concession post and going back to Wilderness Safaris was like reuniting with family. We then moved into operations and were privileged enough to oversee both their Vumbura and Mombo concessions and the five commercial 5-star Lodges located in over 105 000Ha of Okavango Wilderness.*

*Coming home to SA the next time came out of the blue. We were on our month-long break, pottering around our little house in Hoedspruit when we got a call that Olifants Shareblock was looking for a Management couple. An opportunity of a lifetime! To be back in the Lowveld and part of an organisation of people collectively so passionate about our natural surroundings and preserving it for future generations was just fantastic!*

*Nature will always surprise and amaze. If you're having a bad day, she will share something unique and amazing to lighten your soul. And when you get too complacent she will gently tap you on the shoulder and remind you of where you are.*

*Time flies when you're having fun and the last two year have rushed by in the blink of an eye. So stop at every sunset and appreciate the beauty of where we find ourselves...and try not to blink."*



## **FINAL WORD**

Well, that's all for this month! We hope to see you all on the reserve soon and look forward to catching up over a drink on Sunset plains. In the meantime, stay safe, healthy & warm and remember to always look for the silver lining around every cloud and that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow!

Best Regards

**Nick, the management team & staff**

