

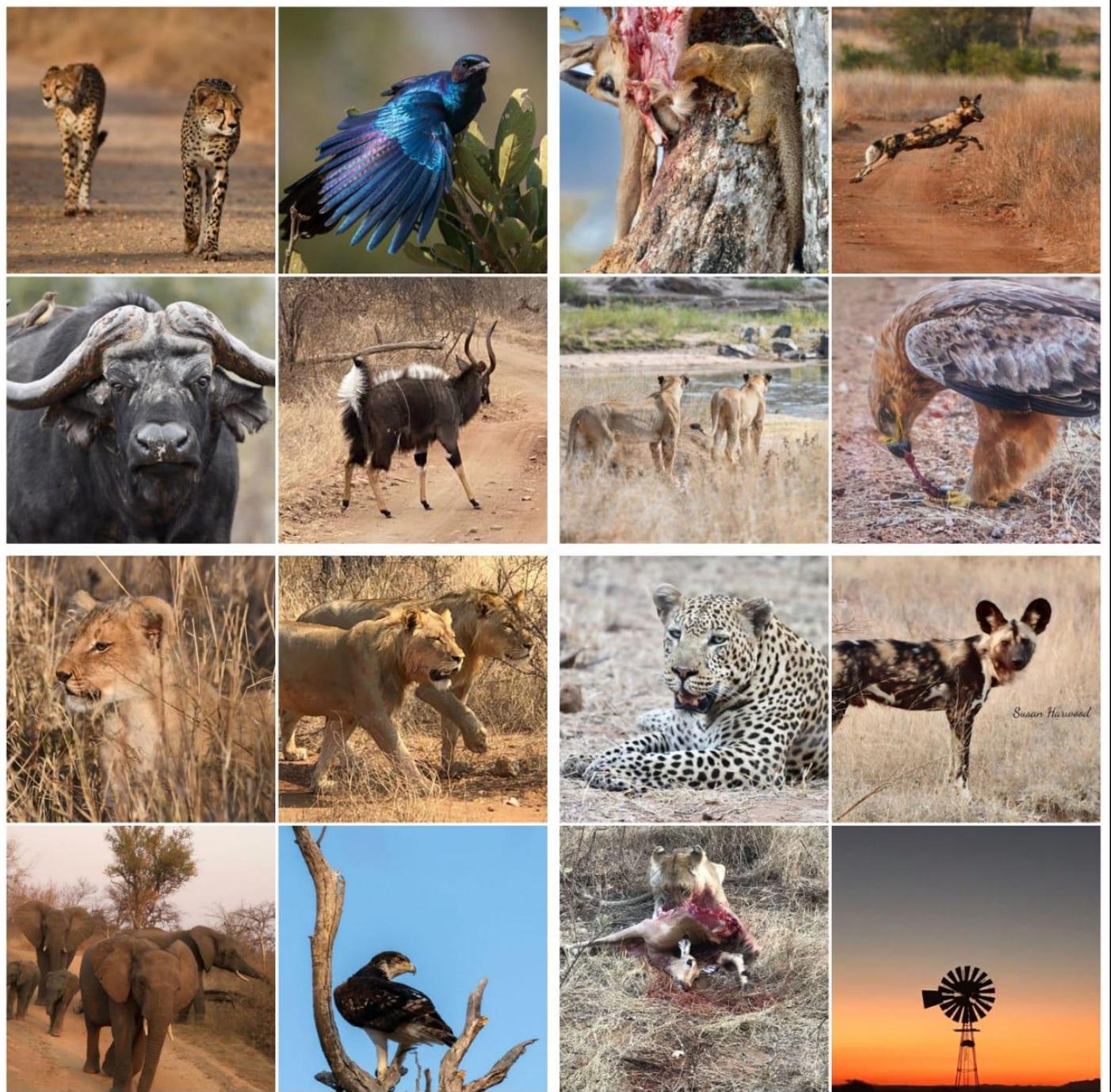


Hello Olifants community!

We hope you are all well. Spring is in the air and there is a tangible change in the atmosphere. The first signs of summer are here and the Sjambok pod (*Cassia abbreviata*) have started flowering with a striking yellow flush on an otherwise brown landscape. Spring is always a firm favourite of mine as we slowly witness the rejuvenating power Mother Nature has in transforming a dry bushveld winter backdrop into a lush green Garden of Eden in a mere few months.

THE GAME DRIVE

August is an excellent month for game viewing in the Lowveld and this has been very evident on Olifants River Game Reserve with excellent sightings throughout the month. The cheetah have once again made multiple appearances, providing hours of joy to our members> Hence, I decided to spotlight this species in the "Creature Feature" below. Big cats have been plentiful with lions and leopards dominating the Telegram sightings group. Buffalo have been more frequent on the reserve and besides the local Dagga Boys, there has been a large herd moving between Sable and Wild Dog pans. Always great to have these mighty beasts on the reserve. Elephant numbers are increasing due to the availability of water on the reserve and I have recorded a herd of 72 individuals recently. Wild dogs have also been quite active in the area as they now move further from their den sites. A special sighting of the month has been a slender mongoose feeding of an impala carcass recently. That's something you don't see every day for sure!



Creature Feature: The Cheetah

Common names: cheetah, southeast African cheetah, hunting leopard (Eng.); jagluiperd (Afr.); lengau (seSotho, seTswana); xikankanka (Xitsonga); ihlosi (isiXhosa); ingulule (isiZulu)

Derivation of the name:

The vernacular name, cheetah, is derived from 'cītā', which in turn comes from the Sanskrit word 'citra' meaning variegated, adorned or painted. The generic name, Acinonyx, is derived from the combination of two Greek words: 'akinitos' meaning unmoved or motionless, and 'onyx' meaning nail – therefore a rough translation would be 'immobile nails', a reference to the cheetah's limited ability to retract its claws. The Latin word 'jubatus' means having a mane or crest, i.e. crested.

Description:

Cheetahs are relatively large in size (2 m head to end of tail, 0.8 m at the shoulder).

The chest of the cheetah is deeply indented to accommodate its large lungs and heart, the two organs being the powerhouses of this sprinter. Their tails are long and acts as a counterbalance steering the cheetah's body when it's running at speed. The head is small and streamlined with small ears. The top of the head and cheeks are finely spotted. The cheetah is easily recognised by distinct 'tear marks' curving downwards from the inner corners of the eyes to the corners of the mouth, with white marks above and under the eyes. They have much smaller teeth than predators of similar size due to these making the skull heavier.

Having reduced dentition makes room for larger nasal cavities to improve the intake of oxygen in a full sprint and assist improved breathing when suffocating their prey. They also have aerodynamic nostrils, which maximise the flow of air over them while running. They also have a spotted coat rather than rosettes, which is characteristic of leopards.

Getting around:

Cheetahs are predators that are specialised for speed and they are known as the fastest land mammals. They are able to reach up to speeds of 75–100 km/h at a full sprint. They have long legs, long flexible spines and wasp like waists that in combination contribute to the long strides necessary for their specialised speed.

Communicating:

The cheetah is considered a vocal felid. It purrs when content or when greeting known individuals. They also growl, which is often accompanied by hissing and spitting, this is usually when faced with danger or when annoyed. They moan or yowl when the danger increases. Agonistic vocalisations – a term that denotes a combination of growls, moans and hisses that is followed by spitting – is more conspicuous in cheetah than in other large cats. In addition to spitting, the cheetah hits the ground with its front paws.

Distribution:

Historically cheetahs were distributed widely throughout Africa and occupied a range of about 25 344 648 km²; however the known range has more recently been drastically reduced to a mere 2 709 054 km² – a shocking decline of 89%. Due to human pressures the distribution of cheetahs have been modified greatly. There is a known population of approximately 6 700 adults across 29 subpopulations left in the wild. The two largest meta-populations occur in East Africa and southern Africa. Its presence across the continent has declined to a mere 10% of the historical range. The range in eastern Africa has reduced to 6% of its original extent, so that presently it is distributed in an area of 310 586 km²

Habitat:

Cheetahs can be found in a wide range of habitats and ecoregions, ranging from dry forest and thick scrub through to grassland and hyper-arid deserts, such as the Sahara. They are only absent from tropical and montane forest. There are reports of cheetah at altitudes of 4 000 m. Possibly the distribution of their prey may influence their habitat preferences. Ideally, an open area with some cover, such as dispersed bushes, because it needs to stalk and pursue its prey over a distance, exploiting its speed. This also minimises the risk of encountering larger carnivores. They will drink when water is available hence the presence or absence of this resource is not an essential habitat requirement. Cheetahs have large home ranges within which there is a specific area which they prefer and will return to.



Food:

Cheetahs are diurnal predators (hunt during the day) to avoid the risk of the presence of larger predators. Although they are diurnal, they prefer hunting or moving around in the cooler morning and late afternoon (crepuscular). For a hunt to be successful, cheetahs need to get as close as possible to their prey, before starting the final sprint. This making them accomplished stalkers. Although cheetahs are relatively large in size, they avoid targeting large ungulates such as wildebeest, zebra, buffalo etc. This is mainly due to the fact that to pull down these animals requires a large amount of strength, which the cheetah lacks. This is also to avoid the risk of getting injured. A coalition of males may cooperatively pull down a larger target, but still go for younger animals. Their main prey consists of any small or medium-sized bovids, especially antelope. Prey with masses of up to 60 kg are favoured.

Due to being specialists in speed they lack defence mechanisms against larger predators such as lion, hyena and even vultures, which makes them susceptible to kleptoparasitism – a form of feeding in which one animal takes prey that was caught or collected by another animal. Cheetahs are usually exhausted after making a kill and only feed once they have caught their breath again.

Friends and foes

There is a negative effect of lions and leopards on cheetahs through kleptoparasitism of kills or by direct mortality. To reduce encounters with larger carnivores such as lions, cheetahs shift their home range further away from areas that pose a high risk of attack or kleptoparasitism by these competing predators. Inter-guild competition amongst carnivores restricts spatial distribution, habitat use and access to prey, resulting in an increase of cheetah deaths. Due to larger carnivores' ecological behaviour of covering massive distances coupled with being confined into small reserves, they are forced to interact frequently, which in turn increases the chance of interference competition. Many of the cheetahs that were reintroduced into fenced reserves did not go as planned. In some reserves there were high mortality rates caused by lions, which may have been made worse by high lion densities.

Smart strategies

Young cheetah cubs (up to three months old) have a layer of grey fur along the top of their backs which at a quick glance makes them look like a honey badger. This mimicry is believed to act as camouflage and also deters large predators who confuse them for the more ferocious and generally avoided honey badger. Adults also have the crest of hair down their backs, however it lies flat and is only lifted when the cheetah wants to accentuate their size and appear more intimidating.

It is believed that cheetahs cannot retract their claws at all, however they do in fact have semi-retractable claws. This trait is adapted to assist the cheetah during a chase. Their pads underneath are hard and often ridged, acting as traction and for the improvement of braking. Within large carnivore guilds, dominant predators such as the lion may pose a threat on the survival rates of mesopredators such as the cheetah. Where cheetahs occur in the same fenced area as lions, they tend to avoid the lions temporally, with lions predominantly hunting at night and cheetahs hunting mostly during the day.

A poorer world without me

There are no known effects on the ecosystem if cheetahs did not exist, however, the removal or decline of any species from an ecosystem may cause functional problems. Most importantly, the cheetah is one of the most unique creatures on planet Earth. It is the fastest land mammal, and one of a series of beautiful wild cats. It would be a shame if future generations weren't able to see this marvellous animal for themselves.

Conservation status and what the future holds

The cheetah is listed as Vulnerable on a global scale on the IUCN Red list, with a known population of approximately 6 700 adults across 29 subpopulations. In South Africa there is an estimated 4 190 adults. Some of the main drivers of a rapid decline in the cheetah population include conflict with larger predators, loss of prey, habitat alteration. In southern Africa, cheetah occur in only 22% (1 223 388 km²) of their former historical range. However, the establishment of enclosed reserves may be the best option available to ensure the continued existence of cheetahs.



Conservation

Annual Predator Survey

As part of the Annual APNR Game Census, the predator census in Balule has taken place in August with two call ups being conducted on ORGR to count the predators on the reserve. The distribution of the call-up station was decided on using geospatial industry norms and knowledge of predator densities. The general game count will follow in September where game will be counted using a helicopter and a fixed-wing for the megaherbivores (Elephant and Buffalo). Once we have all the census data we will include this information in the October Newsletter.



Rehabilitation

The heavily eroded area just to the east of Two Trees, has been rehabilitated with a series of rock gabions to slow down the flow of water. The erosion heads have also been packed with rocky gravel to prevent them from growing. These rehabilitation efforts should drastically reduce the erosion of topsoils in this location.



Buffalo Rescue

The ORGR team was called out to assist with a rescue of three buffalo that had gotten themselves stuck in some very deep mud along the Olifants River. The buffalos were part of a larger herd crossing the river from the north bank and the small group of three wandered into a deadly patch of deep clay soils. These clay pits engulf anything that wanders into them and the buffalo were unable to get themselves out and by the time we reached them, they were on the brink of suffocating in the



thick sticky mud. The operation was very tricky with very little room on the river's edge to work with. The only way to get them out was to pull them out with a vehicle. A decision was made to immobilize the animals with a dart to enable us to rope them up and pull them out of the mud. This meant we had to move very fast as an immobilized and exhausted buffalo would quickly drown in the clay mud. As soon as the drugs took effect we went in to strap the buffalos up and one by one pulled them out. Time was not on our side as the sun was setting. We managed to pull all three out and treated them, sadly one of the three did not make it, she had an old snare cutting deep into her leg which was severely infected, coupled with the ordeal of being stuck in the mud and exhausted, she did not survive. The other two recovered very well and quickly moved off to join the herd.

REACHING OUT

BAGS FOR BUSH BABES!

Some of you have already purchased our Bush Bags and we thank you for your support! These are a nice-to-have for ladies to use on game drive “comfort breaks”. These nifty bags go for R150 and all proceeds go to our APU. Take a look next time you visit the office!

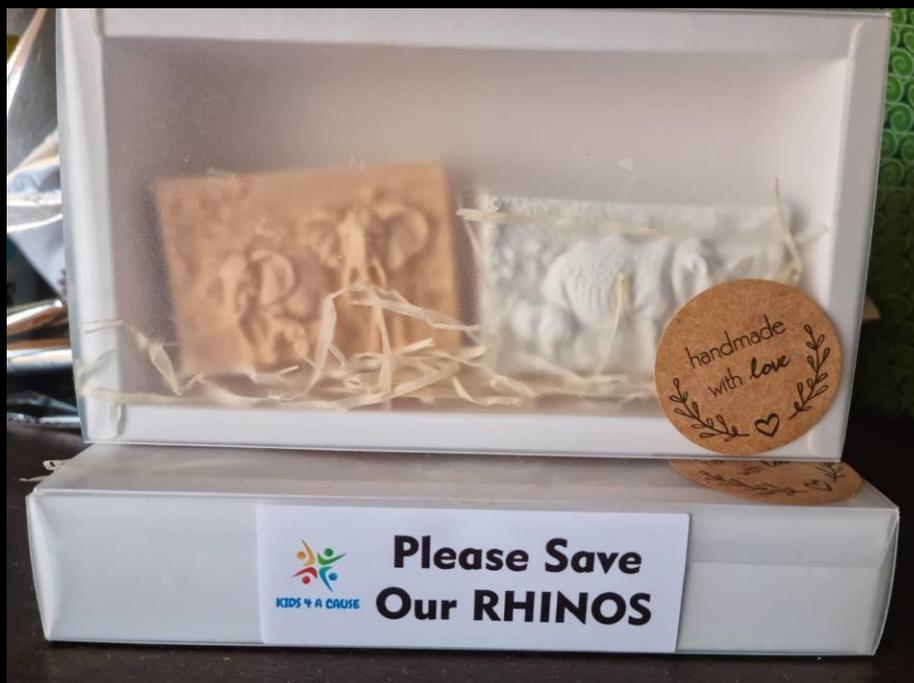


TOYS FOR GIRLS & BOYS!

We are now selling soft toys in the shop which are great gifts for little ones! The stuffed animals go for R325, of which R125 is donated to our APU.

Lather up for Conservation

In our July edition, we wrote about the Kids4 A Cause project wherein four young men (Patrick and Brigitte Daly's grandchildren) in Florida raised enough money through their Back-a-Buddy fundraiser to supply ORGR with seven more AI cameras for our already extensive network. Their latest project is handmade soaps and their goal is to raise enough to purchase a further three cameras, bringing their total to 10. As we head towards Christmas, you might like to consider purchasing some of these beautiful rhino & elephant soaps as gifts which are particularly appropriate during these times when frequent hand-washing is essential). They will be available (R50) in the office shop with effect from mid-September.

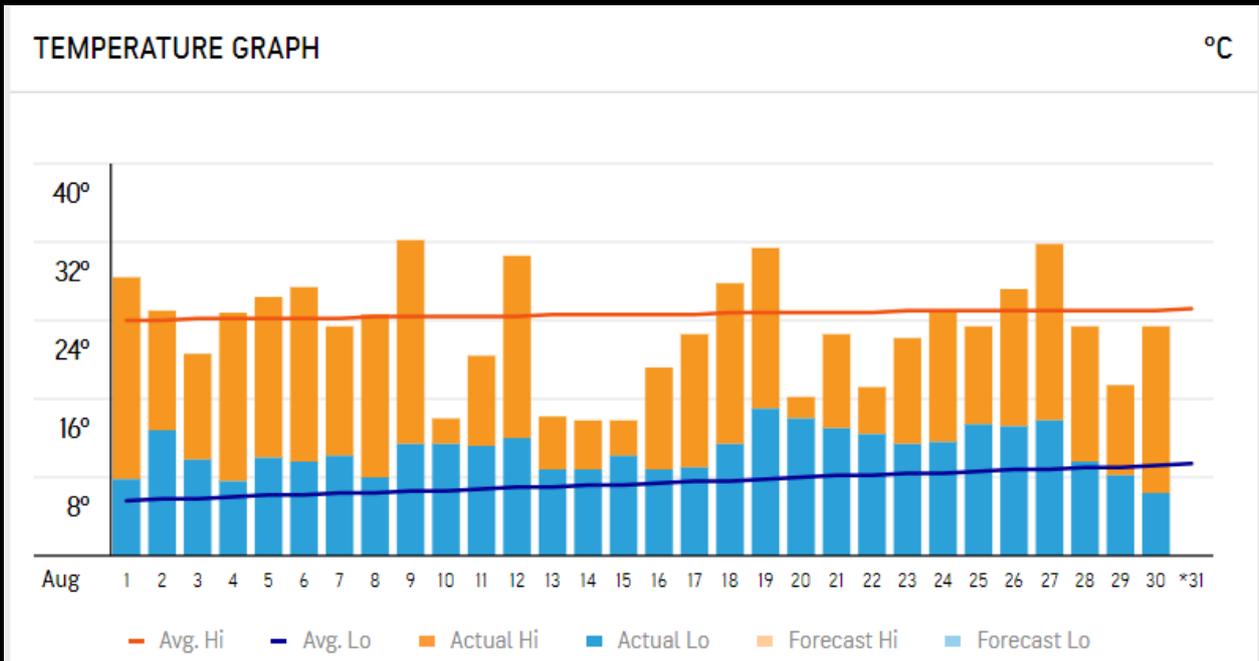


MEMBERS UPDATE

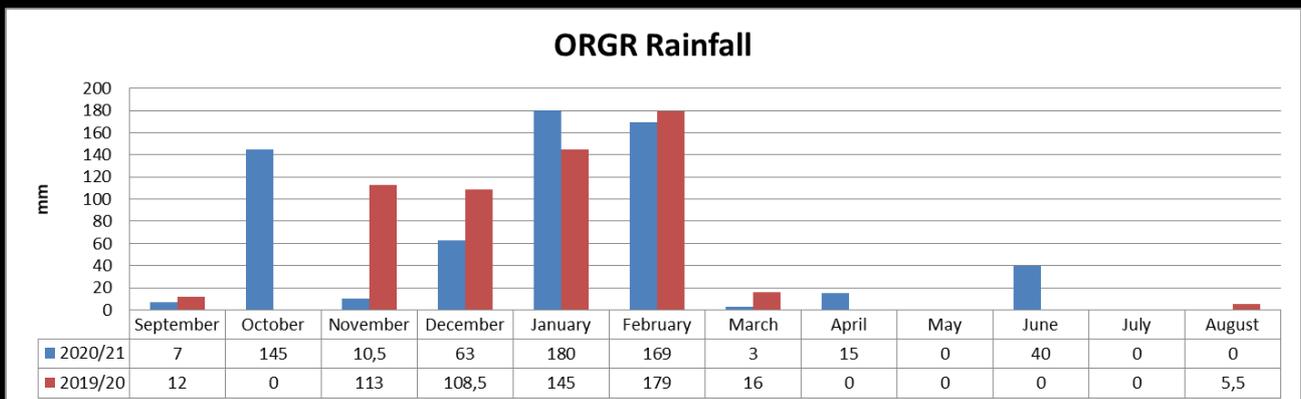
THE WEATHER REPORT

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 spring, with a likely change to a weak La Niña during early-summer. As we move towards the spring and summer season, ENSO starts playing an important role in our summer rainfall. As such, the increased likelihood of a weak La Niña during early summer is expected to be favourable for above-normal rainfall in that period.

We have also been experiencing the cold fronts that have swept across South Africa and for Lowveld standards, we have had some chilly days. The warmth is creeping in though with temperatures in the early thirties occurring more regularly.

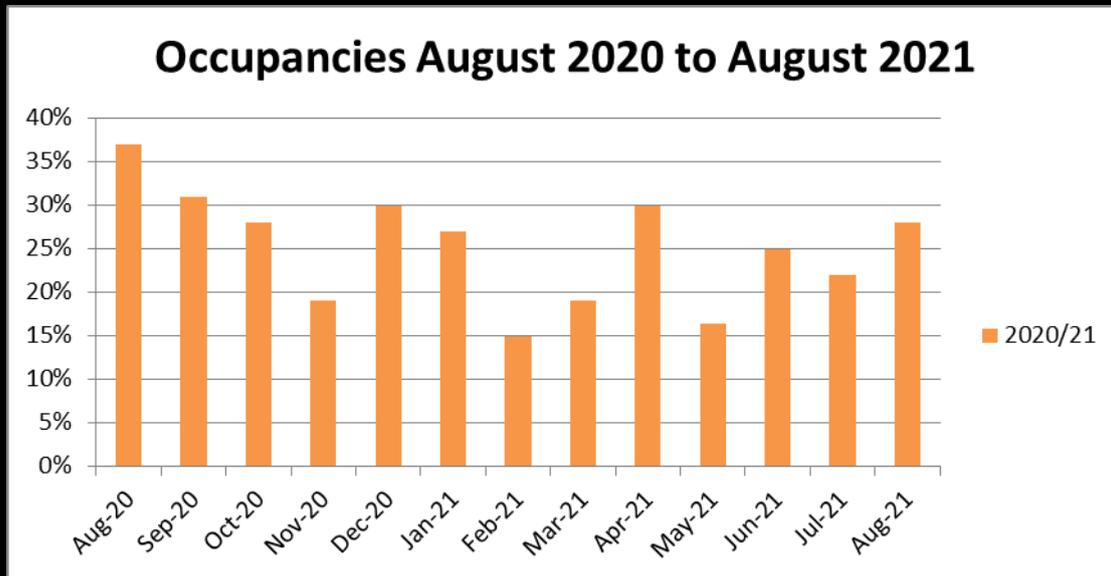


Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season



OCCUPANCY

August has been a busy month on the reserve with an occupancy of 28%. The month started off with a bang with a long weekend seeing 40 units in residence over this period. Our quietest day in August saw 14 units in occupation for a short while lasting three days. The average annual occupancy has once again climbed by another per cent to 25%, meaning on average we have 22 units in residence at any time throughout the year.



September Night Sky In a nutshell...

Moon

Date	Time	Phase
07/09	02h51	New Moon
13/09	22h39	First Quarter
21/09	01h54	Full Moon
29/09	03h57	Last Quarter

Moon – Earth Relations

Perigee: 368 500 km on the 11/09 at 12h06
Apogee: 404 600 km on the 26/09 at 23h44

Planet Visibility

Mercury is located in Virgo and is visible after sunset
Venus is initially located in Virgo but in Libra at month-end and is visible in the evening sky
Mars is not visible this month
Jupiter is located in Capricornus and can be observed after sunset
Saturn is located in Capricornus and can be observed after sunset

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



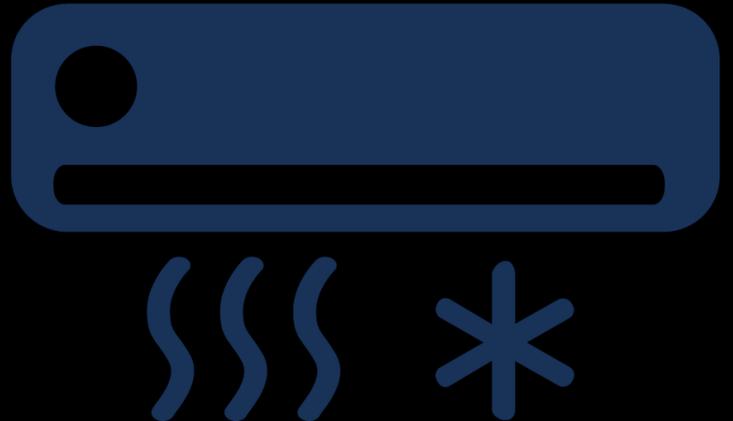
Infrastructure Updates



We have completed the 'Brush and Comb' of the Clubhouse and Cottage rooves which is an important thatch maintenance requirement that ensures roof structure. Longevity. In September we will be rethatching the Laundry building and improving the internal layout to be more functional. This will mean our Laundry offering at the reserve will not be available from the 13th to the 22nd of September. Please contact the office to arrange for laundry to be done via an operator in Hoedspruit during this period. Apologies for the inconvenience caused during this much-needed upgrade.

Airconditioning Service

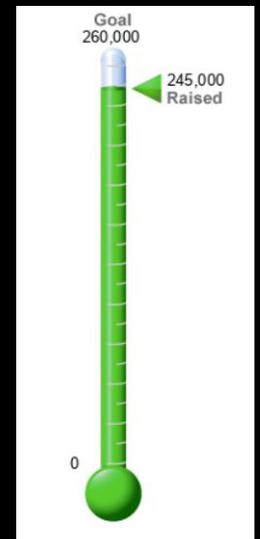
Summer is on our doorstep and it is advisable to service your air conditioning units before the heat kicks in. We have managed to secure a 'Spring special' to service airconditioners with a contractor for R280 per unit, should enough members be interested in getting their aircons serviced. Please contact the office for more information.



2021 APU Fundraising Drive

We have had an incredible response to our request for Fundraising to support our Anti-poaching efforts on the reserve. Our goal was to raise R260 000 during this drive and we have so far received R245 000 from 16 Olifants members. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts - your contribution to the protection of wildlife makes a huge difference on the ground! For those of you who still wish to contribute, please get hold of the office or you can contact me directly.

Sadly we have had to cancel the Annual Golf Day this year, as there have not been enough 4-balls booked to make the day a viable event. Those members who have booked have the option to channel the funds for the 4-ball to the APU fund if they so wish.



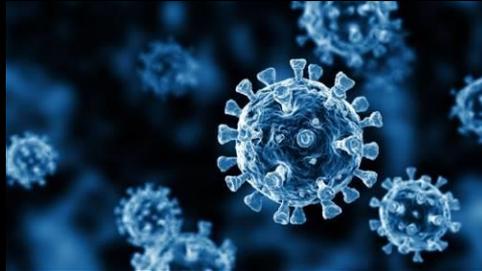
Fire Risk



Until we see the first decent rains falling on the reserve, the area is at a High Fire Risk. We advise all members and users to be cautious with open fires and ensure they are properly doused with water or covered with a fire cover after each use. August and September can be quite windy with temperatures rising slowly which adds to the risk. Please report any fires or smoke to management immediately so we can follow up as quickly as possible.

Covid 19 Protocols

We have made the call to stick with our current Covid-19 protocol (Housekeeping) for the month of September and make a call thereafter. At this stage, there is still a risk of exposure and we would like to minimize this risk to our members and staff. We apologize for the inconvenience caused and appreciate the support.



CAMPFIRE TALES

This is your chance to submit your favourite stories about your encounters and sightings on our wonderful reserve. This month we kick off with one from Susan Harwood of Unit 6., with a recent encounter on Pels Loop.

“We were sitting in our vehicle on Pels, close to the road that leads up to Lawrie’s Lookout (next to the slope going down to the river) when we spotted six or so ellies running down towards us. Kicking up curtains of dust, they immediately moved in closer, very curious and a little agitated. One had a small calf suckling from her, keeping her eyes firmly on us, as the rest of the herd trundled down the road towards our vehicle and surrounded us (except for the side where the bank drops to the river). We had no choice but to watch as things unfolded.

We sat tight, hearts pounding a little more than usual as they took turns inspecting us at close range. The female with suckling calf started scanning the ground beneath with her trunk and began tossing things at us... first a few pebbles followed by sticks, one of which landed in my lap in the front passenger seat. She was clearly telling us we were in her territory!

Once the full herd had arrived, some came in closer, sniffing us and staring, when a “teenager” loomed large at the front of the vehicle, touching it with his trunk, then started swaying, flapping his ears and kicking up more dust. He came in so close, we could smell him and could see his beautiful amber eyes and thick eyelashes.



The others were becoming extremely restless, shuffling around us, churning up the sand roughly, until suddenly, a loud rumble from the matriarch seemingly ordered them to all face towards the rear of the vehicle. They made off at a brisk pace along the road in the direction of the bridge. What message she conveyed, we’ll never know, but like to think she gave us “the nod”, realising we were no threat... so to leave us alone!

They disappeared as quickly as they’d arrived, until all we could see was a cloud of dust, flickering in the late afternoon sun. It was a breathtakingly beautiful encounter and one we will never forget.

Staff Member of the Month

This month we feature a member of staff that all members frequently interact with and she is the “Voice” of Olifants when contacting the office for anything you may need. This is Lourenza Parkin - Members Services Manager of Olifants River Game Reserve.

Lourenza was born in the agricultural town of Standerton on her Grandfather's cattle farm. Together with her two sisters and stepbrother, they moved around the country quite a bit following their parent's work schedule. She has lived in Secunda, Louis Trichard, Venda, Ohrigstad, Lydenburg - and in 1990, the family moved to Hoedspruit where they have remained ever since. Lourenza's mother works for the Airforce and they have been living in Drakensig since moving into town. After school Lourenza worked at a lodge in Timbavati and met Errol. Together they worked for a few lodges in the Klaserie, Timbavati and KNP and their firstborn Georgia arrived in 2009. They then moved to Johannesburg, where Lourenza worked in the healthcare industry, managing casualty units. Dylan was born in Johannesburg in 2013 and afterwards, Lourenza and Errol made the move back to the Lowveld to give the children a bushveld upbringing. Lourenza worked as a dental assistant in Hoedspruit waiting for the perfect opportunity which came about in 2016 when they joined the Olifants River Game Reserve family.



A fact you may not know about Lourenza is that she came from an avid equestrian family and received her Limpopo colours in dressage as well as netball. Lourenza is a vital part of the ORGR Management team and provides an incredible level of service to all of our Members and Users alike.

Well, thats all for now, folks! Catch you for a sundowner at Sunset Plains soon!

Warm regards

Nick, the management team & staff

