



Hello Olifants community!

We have experienced our first seasonal rains, triggering a multitude of plants to start flowing and greening up. Young lilly shoots are already pushing through the soils and the knobbly Combretum is in full flower, adding a very welcome splash of colour to the veld. With Spring firmly settled in, the temperatures have started rising with “daytime degrees” easily reaching the mid-thirties. Summer and the festive season are just around the corner and the year ends in a mere 11 weeks! Please enjoy this month’s newsletter - we hope to see you on the reserve soon!

THE GAME DRIVE

With Spring in full swing, we are already seeing the migratory birds slowly returning. The Yellow-billed Kites are back and I have heard the Klaas's Cuckoo calling on the reserve. In no time the Woodlands Kingfishers will be heralding their presence again!

As per usual, game viewing has been on point on the reserve, with amazing predator sightings including lion, leopard, hyena, cheetah and wild dogs. Elephants are in abundance at the moment with large herds present throughout the reserve. The little Leucistic Steenbok in residence on Lisbon has been seen multiple times this month due to the vegetation being quite thin. It's always special to see him out there.



Creature Feature: The Dung Beetle

With the rainy season around the corner, our local Dung Beetles will be getting a lot more active on the reserve. Although it's always exciting to see the big game at Olifants, it's also about the smaller creatures in the animal kingdom which play a very important role in making sure that the ecosystem stays intact. Remember to avoid driving over elephant dung to ensure you don't squash any beetles!

Rollers, tunnellers, dwellers and stealers...

One can classify dung beetles into four broad categories. The first group – the rollers – will roll dung into round balls for use as food or a source in which the females can lay their eggs. The second group is known as tunnellers. This group buries their dung where they find it. The third group, called the dwellers, do not roll or burrow, but simply live in the manure. The final group, a bunch of lazy beetles, will steal dung balls from the rollers and are known as stealers.



An ancient Greek fable...

The storyteller, Aesop (believed to have lived in ancient Greece around 600 BCE) tells the story of "The Dung Beetle and the Eagle". Despite the appeals of the beetle, the eagle killed a hare. To take revenge on the eagle, the beetle destroyed the eagle's eggs. In despair, the eagle visited Olympus and asked Zeus to look after its latest eggs by placing them in Zeus's lap. When the beetle realised what the eagle has done, he stuffed himself with dung and flew into the face of Zeus. This startled Zeus and in the process he jumped to his feet and dropped the eggs. After an explanation from the beetle, and realising that the eagle had ignored the pleas of the beetle, Zeus instructed the eagle and the beetle to stay away from each other. To ensure that the beetle would now leave the eagle's eggs alone, Zeus changed the breeding season of the eagle to a period when beetles are not above ground.

Creatures with superhuman strength...

On average, dung beetles can roll a ball of 50 times their own weight. One specific species can pull a dung ball 1,141 times their body weight. This is equivalent to a human pulling six double-decker buses full of people...

Dung beetles are very specific on what poop they eat...

Most dung beetles will only eat the dung of a particular animal, or types of animals. They will simply not touch the excrement of other animals. Australian dung beetles refuse to process the dung of the introduced horses, sheep and cattle that "covered" the Australian Outback. These beetles from "Down Under" prefer kangaroo poo and refuse to clean up after the foreigners. To counter this, Australia had to introduce beetles that were adapted to eating cattle, sheep and horse dung before things finally went back to normal.

Hitching a ride..

Two “rolling” beetles, a male and a female, will form and bury a sphere of dung for food storage or to make a brood ball. The male is normally tasked with rolling the ball, with the female often hitching a ride on it. When they reach a soft spot in the soil they will bury the ball and mate underground. After preparing the ball, the female will lay eggs inside. Some species will stay behind to safeguard their offspring; others will leave the eggs to hatch, with the larvae feeding on the dung.



How to find poop...

Dung beetles prefer fresh dung which they find using their sensitive sense of smell. The fresher the dung, the easier it is to find and form their balls. Within minutes of a herbivore dropping their dung, the beetles will move in. Four thousand dung beetles have been observed arriving at a fresh pile of elephant dung within 15 minutes. Shortly afterwards, they were joined by an additional 12,000 dung beetles.

These beetles will use the wind to pick up the smell of fresh dung by flying backwards and forwards across the moving air. As soon as they locate the scent they will follow it upwind until they find the source. Various species of dung beetle fly in and start a free-for-all to make dung balls.

Environmentally friendly...

If it weren't for beetles, dung would harden and cover the ground. Grass and other plants would find it very difficult to grow. Beetles also assist in fertilising the ground by breaking up and burying the dung.

Dung balls to cool off...

Studies show that dung beetles use their dung balls to cool off. During the hotter periods of the day it has been observed that they will climb on top of their spherical constructions to give their feet a break from the hot ground. When scientists put silicone “shoes” on the dung beetles, it was observed that they took fewer breaks and managed to push their ball for longer. Thermal imaging also shows that the dung balls are considerably cooler than the surrounding environment, most likely due to their moisture content.

Dung beetles and the Milky Way...

Scientists have known for some time that dung beetles move in straight lines away from dung piles. This they manage by detecting a symmetrical pattern of polarised light that appears around the sun. Humans are not able to see this pattern, but many insects can, due to the special photoreceptors in their eyes.

But it was not known how beetles use visual cues at night – like the moon and its much weaker polarised light patterns. During a study observing the nocturnal African dung beetle, scientists realised that the beetle could still roll a ball in a straight line, even on moonless nights. They came to the conclusion that the beetles must be using the stars. Further studies have confirmed this theory.

Quick dung beetle numbers

- 800 species in South Africa
- 2,000 species in Africa
- 6,000 species in the world

Conservation

Security Update

We have reached an incredible milestone in our efforts to combat rhino poaching and have managed to go for 365 days without a loss of a rhino on Balule - something that has not happened since 2012. Balule have gone from the worst-performing reserve in anti-poaching to the top-performing reserve in the APNR in a short three years. This is due to the combined efforts of dehorning, better neighbour relations and the development of the ORGR anti-poaching unit - thanks to the incredible Olifants community. Our unit reacts to incursions throughout Balule and in partnership with two BNR regions has created a formidable force with highly skilled operatives and assets at our disposal. The ORGR K9 assets have now become the most reliable tracking hounds in the Lowveld - something that has been archived by continuous training by our dedicated team. Our hounds can follow tracks older than 12 hours with ease and can effortlessly track in the dark of night followed by a team of Rangers kitted out with night vision tech.

The risk of poaching is still extremely high with neighbouring reserves experiencing significant losses recently - so this recent milestone must not render us complacent with success. Poachers will try to kill rhinos on Balule; and we are now simply more prepared than ever to take them on.

Water Usage

As part of our Conservation Management plan, we have started to record all water we extract from underground reservoirs. It is vitally important for us to know how much water we consume on the landscape and once we have a couple of months of data can see where we can reduce usage.

ORGR extracted 11,7 million litres of water in September with 4,2 million litres consumed for residential use and 7,5 million litres used to fill our waterholes on the reserve.

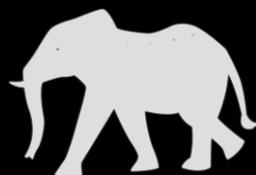
Our largest consumer of water by far is Hide Dam which requires 4,7 million litres a month to maintain at a full level. That's a whopping 40.37% of ORGR's total water consumption in one dam.

Annual Game Count

The Annual Ariel Game count has been completed and the data is currently being processed into a presentable format. I will share the highlights of the report in the next Newsletter once we have received the final version.



ORGR
ANTI-POACHING UNIT
BALULE



REACHING OUT

As always, a big thank you to everyone who has been donating dictionaries and books which have been handed over to Sigagule and to two schools in the Hoedspruit area which are battling to fill their libraries.

Our rainwear and shoe drives earlier this year, for Sigagule, have been a great success too! We need to continue with the rainwear drive now that the rainy season is upon us...so we can also supply them to Maseke school children. Please deliver your donations to the ORGR office.



With the festive season almost upon us, remember the fun items for sale in the ORGR office which will make great gifts. Sales of the "Save the Rhino and Elephant" soaps are going well, with 13 having been purchased recently. We still have stocks of the wild animal soft toys for the little ones and of course our "Bush Bags" designed especially for ladies on game drives. Proceeds from all these items go to our fantastic APU!

Thank you as always to those contributing to the Balule Outreach Trust which is continually doing phenomenal work, uplifting the surrounding impoverished communities. The Trust relies for funding on the generosity of all members of the Balule Nature Reserve conservancy, their friends and associates. The two share blocks, Olifants North Game Reserve and Olifants River Game Reserve are anchor donors who have committed to making substantial grants on an annual basis. If you would like to donate, the account details are as follows:

First National Bank (FNB), Bryanston, South Africa
Account number: 6233 678 7877 Clearing Code: 250-017
Swift number: FIRZAJJXXX
Please reference EFT payments with your name.

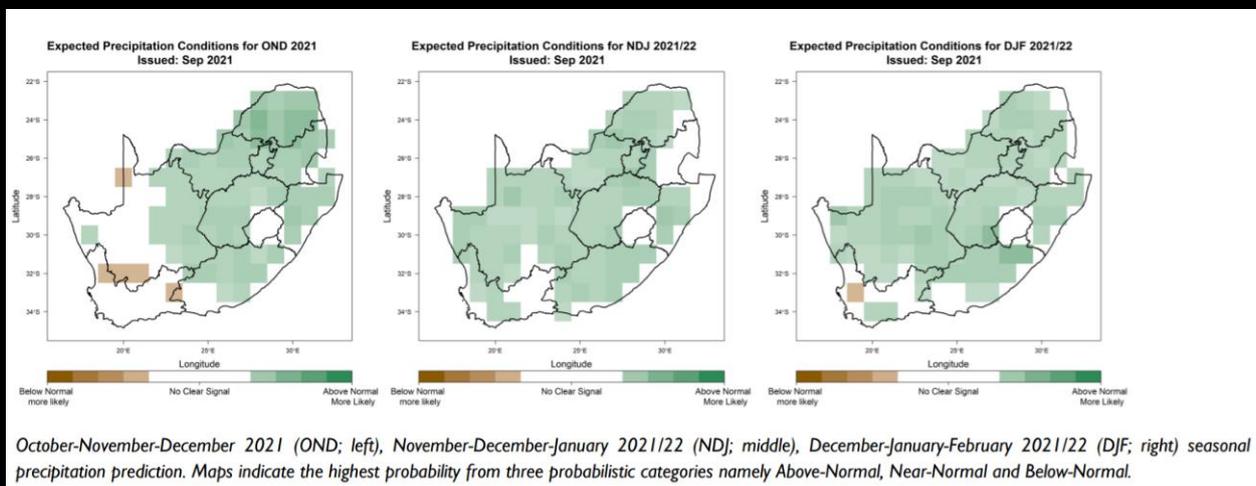
MEMBERS UPDATE

THE WEATHER REPORT

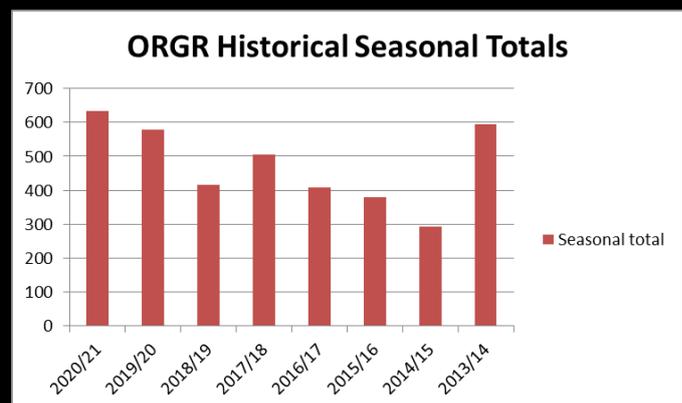


The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is currently in a neutral state and the forecasts indicate that it will most likely remain in a neutral state for spring, with a likely change to a weak La Niña during early- and mid-summer. As we move towards the mid-summer season, ENSO starts playing an important role in our summer rainfall. As such, the increased likelihood of a weak La Niña during early- and mid-summer is expected to be favourable for abovenormal rainfall in that period. The multi-model rainfall forecast indicates mostly above-normal rainfall for the north-eastern half of the country throughout the early-summer and mid-summer seasons.

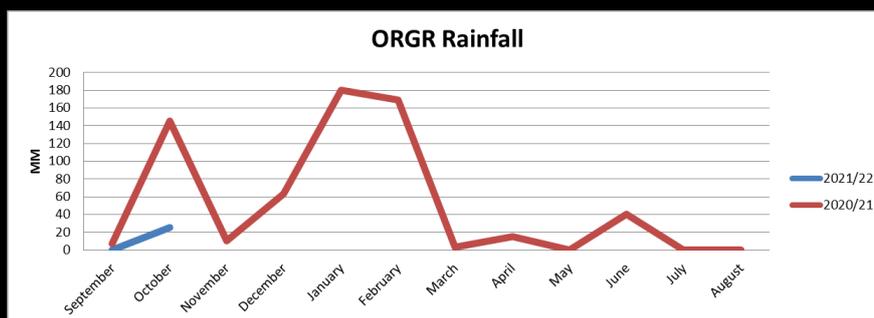
We have also been experiencing the cold fronts that have swept across South Africa and for Lowveld standards, we have had some chilly days. The warmth is creeping in thought with temperatures in the early thirties occurring more regularly.



The new rainy season has started and we have recorded 25mm of rain so far. We are expecting good rains this summer. Last season we ended off with 632.5mm, the highest rainfall since 2012.



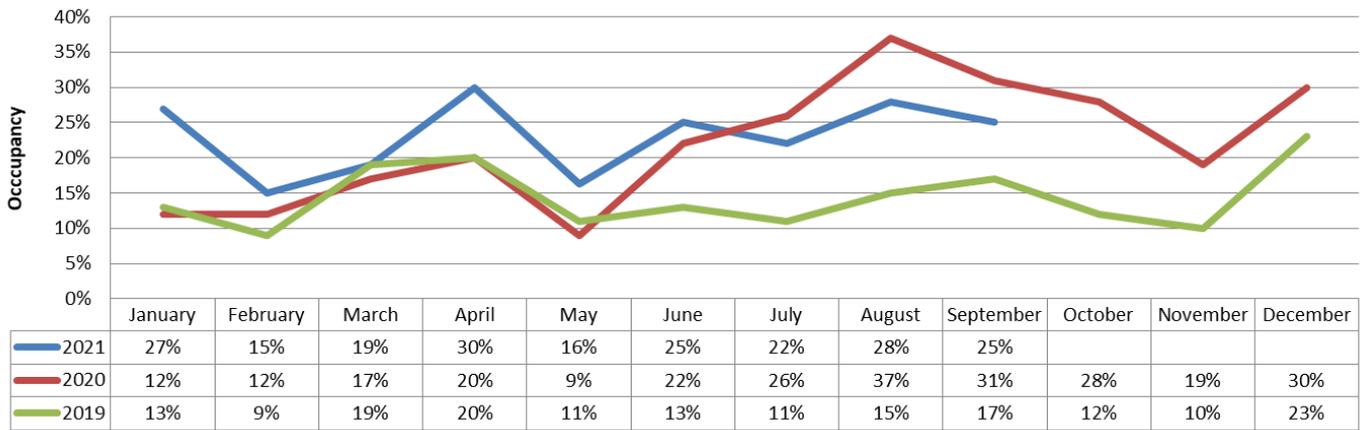
Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season



OCCUPANCY

September saw 25% of the units occupied on average during the month with a peak of 31 units in residence and a low of 12 units in residence. Occupancies remain high but have not matched the post lockdown peaks of August and September last year. Below is a three-year comparison of what occupancies have done on the reserve.

ORGR 3 Year Occupancy



October Night Sky In a nutshell...

Moon

Date	Time	Phase
06/10	13h05	New Moon
13/10	05h25	First Quarter
20/10	16h56	Full Moon
28/10	22h05	Last Quarter

Moon – Earth Relations

Perigee: 363 386 km on the 08/10 at 19h27
 Apogee: 404 615 km on the 24/10 at 17h28

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

Planet Visibility

Mercury is located in Virgo and is visible after sunset at the beginning of the month, and before sunrise from mid-month

Venus is located in Libra and is visible after sunset

Mars is not visible this month

Jupiter is located in Capricornus and is visible in the evening sky Saturn is located in Capricornus and is visible in the evening sky



Infrastructure Updates



We have recently completed the construction of four new staff rooms at the top compound to improve our staff accommodation offering with the revamp of the bottom compound units. We are aiming for completion by the end of October. The ORGR Laundry building has been rethatched and an internal revamp of the available working space has been completed to allow for expanded storage and create a more functional space.

Water meters have been installed on all 13 of the reserve's boreholes, so we can start to monitor our consumption of this natural resource. The water for residential use will be tested this month as per our Management

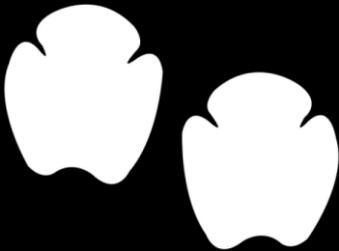
Plan.

New Tractor

ORGR has recently purchased a new tractor to improve productivity and reduce the maintenance cost of running the old machines. We sold our old SAME tractor to a collector to make room for the new workhorse which will be predominantly used for heavy work, including gravel hauling and pulling tyres on the roads.



2021 APU Fundraising Drive



We have had an incredible response from our members during this recent APU funding drive. We manage to raise a total of R420 960 since August. We are eternally grateful for all your contributions, these funds will go a long way in our quest to protect our natural resources on the reserve. A portion of these funds have already been allocated to night vision, thermal capabilities, AI detection & LPR cameras.

Game Drive Etiquette Reminders

Please remember the following protocols when out enjoying a game drive on Olifants River Game Reserve. These have recently been raised by members:

- Exiting your vehicle within 200m of any waterhole is not permitted; nor is it permitted within sight of a waterhole unless there exists provision to do so, such as to enter a hide or at lookout point.
- Do not shine spotlights at other vehicles, people or lodges. While at a sighting, the use of red filters is encouraged.
- The use of single or multiple row LED light bars, whether bumper- or canopy-mounted, is strictly forbidden. Conventional bumper-mounted spot lights are permitted but only if they illuminate in combination with the standard high-beam lighting of the vehicle.

Share of Unit for Sale

There is a third share of unit 35 being offered for sale. In terms of the Use Agreement, this offer is being made to fellow shareholders. The unit is positioned on Grootdraai, with a beautiful view of the Olifants River. The house was completely rebuilt in 2009; it has four bedrooms and four bathrooms, a spacious living / kitchen area, and has been very well maintained. The sale includes the unit's vehicle (Toyota Hilux). Please contact the office for any further details and enquiries.



Braai Gadget for Sale

Unit 67 has managed to arrange some of these very useful Chop Racks for us to sell in the shop, with all proceeds going to APU. What is better than crispy rendered fat with your favourite pork or lamb chop? Use this four-slot chop braai rack to crisp up that fat with ease. No more balancing acts on your braai grid. Just pop your chops into your Braai rack and get crunchy fat without overcooking the meat. Enquire at the office for selling price. The perfect gift for the braai master in your life!



CAMPFIRE TALES – The day Page led me into trouble

Nick Leuenberger

Elephants had pushed over a large Knobthorn tree on Hyena Road and we went out with a team to chop the tree up and clear the road. While the guys got busy with the chainsaw, With a rifle slung over my shoulder, I took the opportunity to take a walk down and into the Palm Loop riverbed to look for any rhino activity. Page was leading the way with her nose to the ground and tail wagging in the air in true Beagle fashion. After a couple of hundred meters, something caught Page's attention in a Spike Thorn thicket and she followed her nose straight into the thick bush. I got down on my hands and knees and followed her in.



It was dark in the thicket and the air was heavy with the scent of trouble. I thought to myself, "this is not a good idea" and called to Page to stop her from going forward. At that point, we heard a deep grunt-like bellow from a beast two meters in front of us. The sound sent chills up my spine and I knew exactly what creature produced this warning. BUFFALO!!!

By the time I managed to focus my eyes ahead, the thicket came alive with movement; and Page already decided to pull out of the sighting at pace back into the river bed, leaving me behind to deal with her findings. We had wandered into three Dagga Boys who were peacefully having a snooze in the shade, out of the heat of the sun. Needless to say, they were not impressed, being woken by a Beagle and a Khaki-clad Malungu!

I managed to scramble to my feet as the lead buffalo charged forward and hurled myself into the riverbed just in time to avoid being hit. As I entered the riverbed I saw little Page already 50 meters ahead gunning it back to safety. With some choice words, I bolted in the same direction through the dense riversand, hoping the beast would decide not to follow through. Those authors who wrote the books on how to behave around dangerous game and suggest "Whatever you do, don't run!" clearly did not have this scenario in mind. Adrenaline pumping through my system, I bolted at an incredible pace along the riverbed and eventually up onto a rocky clearing where Page was already waiting for me with what I can only describe as a grin on her face.



When I looked back I saw all three buffalo had trotted into the riverbed but had given up the chase after a few meters, clearly intimidated by the vocabulary as I sprinted to safety. They eventually settled down and Page and I sat on the rocks for a moment watching the grumpy old men slowly disappear back into the shadows while we caught our breath and reflected on the encounter.

Lesson Learned: Never become complacent in the bush - and expect the unexpected at all times.

Should you have exciting stories of your own to share please send them to us for inclusion in the newsletter.



Final Word

To end off this Month's Newsletter we would like to share a limerick written by Neale Ferguson from unit # 4.

ORGR

*The ride to Hide Dam is long, it's far
Its bumpy and dusty with doors all ajar
Save and protect all that you see
every animal, bird, flower and tree
Is this clear, is alles klar?*

Well, that's all for now, folks! Catch you for a sundowner at Sunset Plains soon!

Warm regards

Nick, the management team & staff

