



February 2022 News

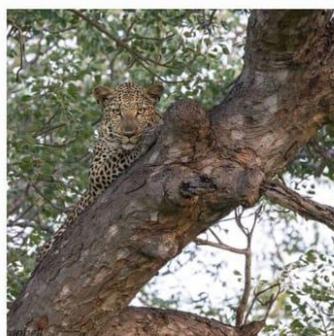
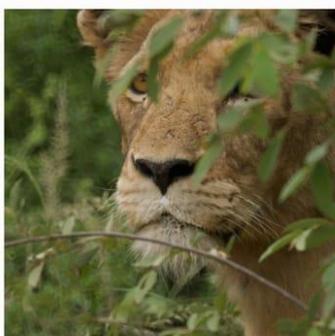
Hello Olifants community!

2022 is off to a good start and we are already one month down, with Christmas just around the corner 😊. The reserve is at its peak of summer vegetation and the grasses are already ever so slowly starting to turn a lighter shade of green, with a lot of the seeds being dispersed already.

Enjoy the February Newsletter!

THE GAME DRIVE

January has produced world-class sightings on the reserve despite the bush being particularly dense at this time of the year. Lions have been seen regularly and they seem to enjoy using the road network to move around instead of pushing through the thick bush. Leopards, although still being seen, have all the advantages to remain hidden right now. A few old buffalo bulls are hanging around at the pans and dams and elephant numbers are still fairly high despite a lot of water being available in the region. Mid-summer has brought some brilliant snake sightings as well some wet weather specialists like the Giant African Land Snail.



Creature Feature– Solifuge – the legendary 'baardskeerde'

By Dr Anina Lee

If I were to write a script for a horror movie, I would not have to invent the 'alien' that threatens the world. I would simply blow up a solifuge to 20 times its size. A two-metre solifuge would scare the living daylight out of me – and I dare say most other people. Nature has already invented the stuff of nightmares, but because they are mostly small and probably harmless, we don't live in constant fear for our lives.



So what is a solifuge? Solifuges are arachnids – eight-legged creatures – as are spiders. They have many different names. The Afrikaans name 'baardskeerder' refers to the urban legend that they shave beards and other hair while the subject is asleep. Not so – their mouthparts are not made to cut hair. The myth probably arose from the fact that female solifuges do collect shed animal hair to line their nests.

Most solifuge species are nocturnal, but those that hunt during the day are generally bright reddish-brown, covered with setae (hair-like structures) of various lengths, some up to 50mm, resembling shiny red hair. These setae are thought to be tactile sensors.

Another Afrikaans nickname for these colourful creatures is 'rooiman' (red man), which led to the English corruption 'Roman' or 'Red Roman'. Yet another common name is 'Jerrymunglum', the origin of which I have been unable to find out.

The diurnal solifuge species that hunt during the day are very averse to sunlight. The name Solifuge is derived from the Latin 'fugere' (to flee; fly; run away) and 'sol' (sun). This habit of escaping the sun is responsible for freaking out many people who encounter them, especially in hot desert areas.

The shadow we cast is oh so attractive to a solifuge, which will run towards that shadow. Runaway and he will run after you – or rather after your shadow. And no matter how fast you run, you cannot outrun him. It's not for nothing that they are nicknamed the 'Kalahari Ferrari'. A person who is not familiar with this habit and the fact that they are harmless could miss a heartbeat or two. It must be one of the few wild creatures that appears to 'attack'.

Solifuges may look like they have ten legs, but the first pair of appendages is the pedipalps. These are very strong and are used for various functions such as drinking, mating, climbing and catching. A most unusual feature enables the solifuge to catch prey. The unique suctional organs on the tips of the pedipalps 'suck' onto the target and bring it back to the chelicerae (mouthparts). In this respect, a pedipalp functions a bit like a chameleon's tongue.

The chelicera is the most awesome of the Solifuge features. The mouthpart is big – fearsomely big compared to the body – and prominent. There are two parts to the chelicera that work a bit like our jaws. The lower 'jaw' moves up and down, and the upper one is fixed, like our own. Both parts are armed with cheliceral teeth for crushing prey. Prey consists of insects, spiders, scorpions, reptiles and small birds.

Some Solifuges sit in the shade and ambush their prey. Others run their prey down. Once they catch the prey, they eat it while it is still alive with vigorous ripping and cutting actions of the powerful jaws. Solifuges are not venomous, despite their fearsome appearance and are themselves eaten by raptors, owls and small mammals including the Bat-eared fox, Small-spotted genet, Cape fox, African civet and Black-backed jackal.

Solifuge males have an enviable seduction technique. First, the male seeks out a female. Using the suctional organ on a pedipalp, he rips the female from her hideout. He then uses his pedipalps to caress her into a passive state and massages her abdomen with his chelicerae while he deposits a spermatophore (sperm package) in her genital opening. Following mating, up to 200 eggs are produced, which hatch within about four weeks. The first stage of development is a larva. The larva moults into a nymph, which then passes through 9–10 instars before maturity. The adults live for only about a year.



Conservation

Security Report

PROVINCES AND NATIONAL PARKS	2019	2020	2021
SANParks	328	247	209
Gauteng	5	2	2
Limpopo	45	18	38
Mpumalanga	34	13	39
North West	32	19	32
Eastern Cape	2	0	0
Free State	11	1	24
Northern Cape	4	1	1
Kwa-Zulu Natal	133	93	102
Western Cape	0	0	4
Total	594	394	451

A total of 451 rhino were poached in South Africa in 2021, 327 within government reserves and 124 on private property. The APNR reserves have not had a great year with the poaching incidents in 2021. A total of 43 rhinos were killed in our partner reserves with only, Balule, Thornybush and Kapama not losing any animals. Kruger is reporting astronomical losses as well. The problem is not going away and if anything it will intensify as the populations of rhino diminish further. KNP has seen a reduction of 75% of White rhino in the last 10 years and the population is in a downward spiral.

On Balule, we are now sitting at 485 days without having experienced a loss at the time of writing this report. An excellent achievement.

Sadly we are going to retire our K9 Jan from active duty. He has performed well in his two years with us and fulfilled his two primary functions, namely to kick-start the ORGR K9 unit; and to catch a poacher, - both of which he has performed. We received Jan as an older dog with experience and you can see that he is now slowly losing his drive. He has lived a hard life as a working dog and deserves to retire. Tiya is fully operational and will take over as lead tracking dog for us at ORGR. Nancy and Allan Hartman have kindly offered to adopt Jan to live the rest of his life with them in Johannesburg.



Conservation Projects

The rehabilitation projects we conducted last year have turned out very well and it seems our methods are working. For this following year, we would like to continue to rehabilitate areas that need attention as well as work on a burn project to use fire as an ecological tool to manage our landscape. I will be working closely with our neighbours at Ukozi and ONGR with this project to share ideas and resources.

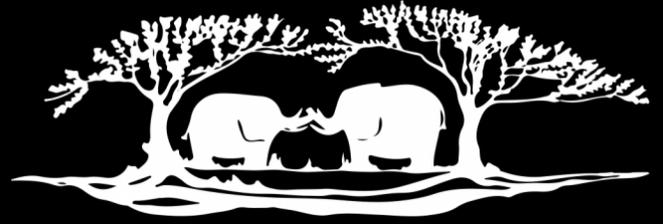
Balule Nature Reserve has a new Chairman

We would like to congratulate our very own Vince Ryan for taking on the leadership position of BNR and becoming the new Chairman of the reserve! We are very proud to have you at the helm of this ship. Louise Cleary has also been very instrumental on the Baule landscape and the reserve is richer with you both actively involved. Thank you for your commitment.



REACHING OUT

Now, more than ever before, we need to assist in alleviating poverty in the communities surrounding our reserve as a lot of jobs were lost during lockdown - and many don't pay well. Due to total ignorance and false beliefs, rhino horn is still in huge demand in Asian states where they are used in traditional medicines. Whilst lockdown was in place, there was a 33 percent reduction in rhino poaching for various reasons, but now with flight restrictions and stringent methods to halt the spread of the Covid virus have been either lifted or relaxed, the syndicates are hitting hard and there is an alarming resurgence in rhino poaching.



High levels of poverty exacerbated by Covid in the surrounding communities have increased food insecurity and people are battling more to put meals on their tables. Apart from the humanitarian need to provide food and supplies to impoverished communities, it is vital in a political sense for us to be seen as supporting such people wherever we can. We need to continue offering bursaries to promising learners; supplementing and providing food parcels; and donating stationery, toys, school shoes (currently size one – nine are in demand), reading books, school uniforms and clothing. We will continue providing articles to our local newspapers about the above as well as stories of upliftment and opportunities for enthusiastic and trustworthy staff in order to spread the word that we are a caring group of “haves” who are doing what they can for the “have nots”.

This month, we have received some stationery for little ones, 10 pairs of Bata school shoes, an enormous bag full of beautiful beanies and blankets for children, as well as surgical swabs and a digital thermometer which will be distributed within the next two months.

On a very happy note, we are delighted to announce that the two Grade 12 bursary students, Chantal Mnisi and Malebo Sekome, completed their IEB matriculation last year and have passed their exams sufficiently to pursue a tertiary education.

We thank all those supporting these initiatives – together we are making a big difference! If you would like to contribute to the Balule Outreach Trust herewith banking details:

The Balule Outreach Trust, First National Bank (Bryanston, South Africa) Account number: 62336787877 Clearing Code 250-017 Swift number: FIRNZAJJXXX Please use your name and unit number as the reference and provide us with your email address so we can send you a tax relief certificate.



MEMBERS UPDATE



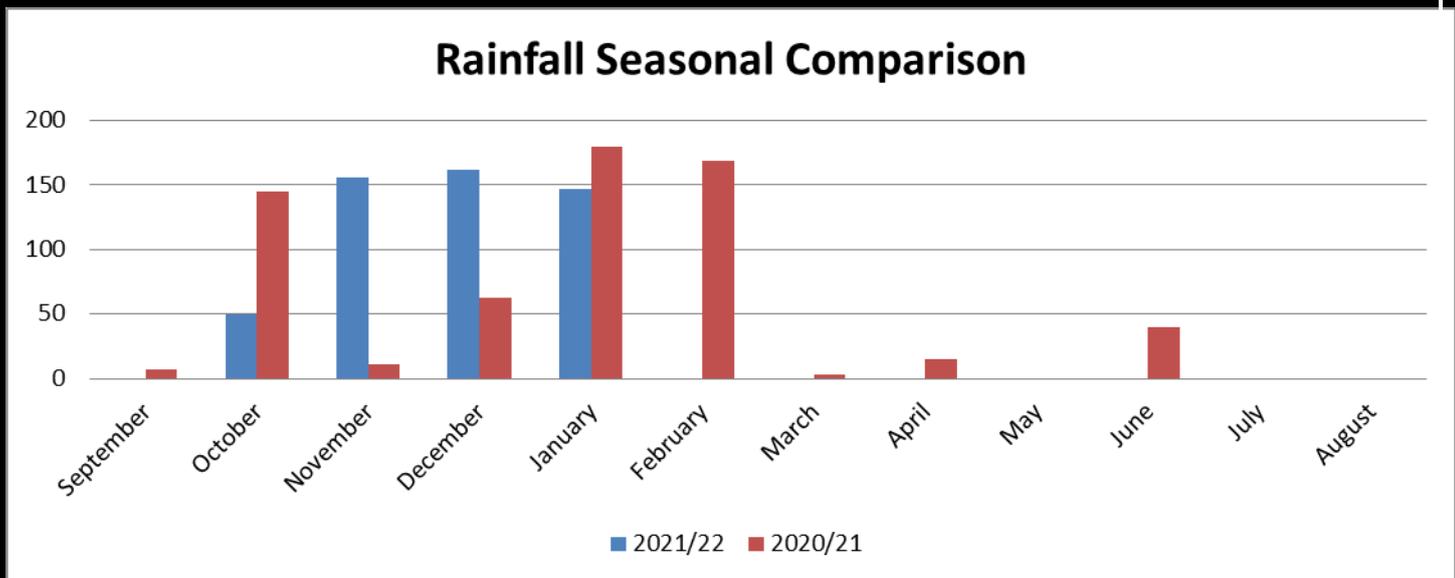
THE WEATHER REPORT

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is currently in a La Niña state and the forecasts indicate that it will likely remain in a La Niña state throughout the summer. During mid- and late-summer, the presence of ENSO plays an important role in our rainfall. The presence of a La Niña during mid-and late-summer is typically favourable for above-normal rainfall for the summer rainfall areas during that period.

The multi-model rainfall forecast indicates mostly above-normal rainfall for the larger part of the country during the late-summer (JFM), through to the mid-autumn (MAM) season. Mostly above-normal minimum temperatures are expected across the country during late-summer and early-autumn (FMA), except for the south-western parts of the country during mid-autumn when below-normal minimum temperatures are expected. Mostly below-normal maximum temperatures are expected across the country during late summer and early autumn, except for the north-eastern parts of the country during mid-autumn when above normal maximum temperatures are expected.

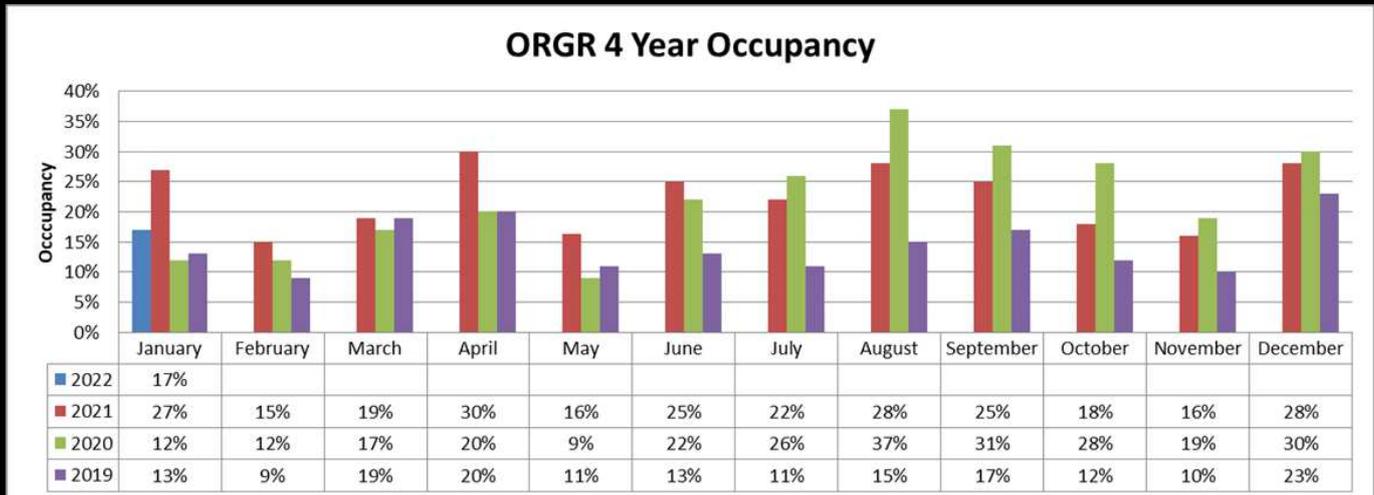
We have 147mm in January with a season total of 515mm so far compared to 405mm at the same time last year. The rains have been excellent and the reserve has recovered dramatically since the drought years. The summer temperatures have been fairly mild for Lowveld standards and we have not experienced any heatwaves in the last two months. Average daytime temperatures have been around 30 degrees.

Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season



OCCUPANCY

The first 10 days in January were very busy with a peak of 48% of the units in occupation. The rest of January slowed down a little and we ended off with a 17% occupancy with our quietest day seeing only five units in residence. The table below is a four-year comparison of occupancies on the reserve.



November Night Sky In a nutshell...

Moon

Date	Time	Phase
01/02	07h46	New Moon
08/02	15h50	First Quarter
16/02	18h56	Full Moon
24/02	00h32	Last Quarter

Moon – Earth Relations

Perigee: 367 789 km on the 27/02 at 00h25
 Apogee: 404 896 km on the 11/02 at 04h37

Planet Visibility

Mercury is visible in the morning sky near the stars of the constellation Sagittarius at the beginning of the month and near Capricornus at month-end.

Venus is visible in the morning sky near the stars of the constellation Sagittarius.

Mars is visible in the morning sky near the stars of the constellation Sagittarius.

Jupiter is located near the stars of the constellation Aquarius and is visible in the evening sky.

Saturn is caught in the solar glare and is not visible.

Meteor Showers

Two meteor showers are active in February. The gamma-Normids are active from February 25th to March 22nd, peaking on the 13th of March. To see the shower, look towards the constellation of Norma between 00:00 a.m. and 04:00 a.m. Around 8 meteors per hour are expected at the peak.

The alpha Centaurids, in the constellation of Centaurus, are active from the 28th of January to the 21st of February, peaking on the 8th of February as the Earth passes through the centre of the meteor stream. They are best viewed between 22:00 p.m. and 03:30 a.m. looking towards the constellation of Centaurus in the south-east. Hourly rates are expected to be around 7 meteors per hour at the maximum.

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



New ORGR Can and Bottles Sleeves Available



We have some limited stock of these very nice ORGR neoprene beverage cooler sleeves in the office shop. Handy to keep your drinks cold on those hot bushveld days. Pop in and grab yours before they disappear off the shelves!

Should these cooler sleeves prove to be popular we will get another batch in and possibly expand on the range.

"Life is better with a cold drink in your hand."

Radio Upgrade Updates – Midband to Digital

The digital repeater was installed in late December and the setup was finalized in mid-January. There have been some challenges with linking the old mid-band repeater which is being resolved, but as of the 1st of February, ORGR is running Admin and APU channels off the new repeater. There have been stock challenges in the country for Hytera radios but I am hoping this will alleviate soonest. Once we are satisfied the mid-band link for the Game Drive channel works on the digital radios, we can give the go-ahead to the members to purchase digital radios should they choose. Note that no benefits of a digital network will be experienced by members until we move to digital 100%.



Grootdraai Cable Replacement

A section of old mainline cable on Grootdraai has been replaced in January. This old section was starting to produce multiple breaks on the line due to its age and a decision was made to replace this section with new 836 meters of 25mm Armadac SWA cable. This upgrade of cable will prevent further breakages on the line and interruptions of electricity to the Grootdraai units.



Blind Corners

The vegetation on the reserve is currently very thick from the last three years of excellent rains we have received. There are a few blind corners on the game drives roads where the bush is thick enough to obscure your view around a corner. Please be cautious and tackle these corners slowly to avoid any collisions with vehicles or animals. The ORGR team will do their best to thin out any heavily vegetated corners.



Staff Profile

This month we feature staff member Friday Shongwe. Friday plays a vital role in our technical team and is our primary tractor and Front End Loader operator. He is handy in all aspects of maintenance on the reserve.

Friday was born in the village of Somerset on the boundary of the great Kruger National park in Mpumalanga. He is the eldest of three children and has a younger brother and sister. After his schooling, Friday started at Olifants in 1992 where he joined his father Edward who was already working with us. He was a temporary worker for a year and in 1993 became a permanent employee. His father Edward taught him how to operate the machinery and he quickly became one of our primary operators. He is married to Martha who is part of our housekeeping team and has three children of his own – one girl and two boys. In his spare time, he works on his home to keep it well maintained and enjoys a good game of football.



Final Word

This is one of my favourite poems by Ian Mccallum. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

Wilderness

*Have we forgotten
that wilderness is not a place,
but a pattern of the soul
where every tree, every bird and beast
is a soul maker?*

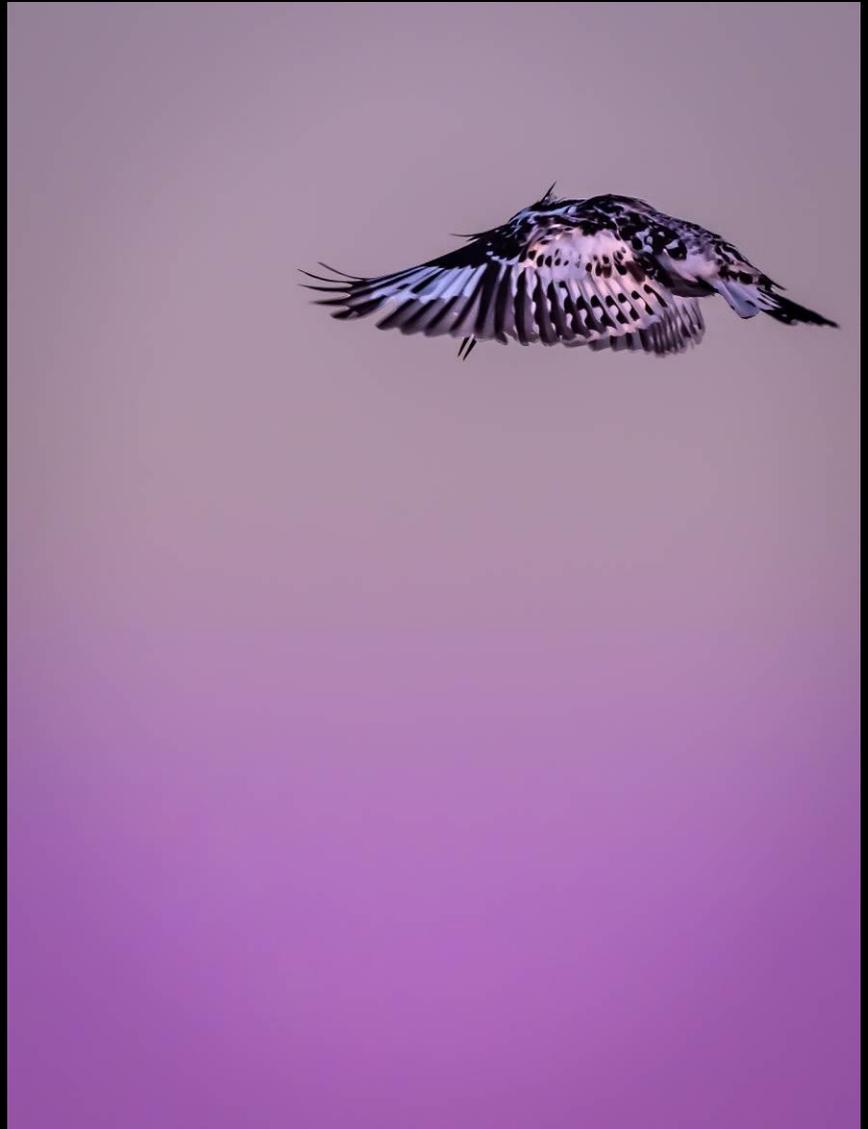
*Have we forgotten
that wilderness is not a place
but a moving feast of the stars,
footprints, scales and beginnings?*

*Since when
did we become afraid of the night
and that only the bright stars count?
Or that our moon is not a moon
unless it is full?*

*By whose command
were the animals
through groping fingers,
one for each hand,
reduced to the big and little five?*

*Have we forgotten
that every creature is within us
carried by tides
of earthly blood
and that we named them?*

*Have we forgotten
that wilderness is not a place
but a season
and that we are in it's
final hour?*



Well, that's all for now, folks! We hope you are all well and that we see you on the reserve very soon!
Stay Safe!!

Warm regards

Nick, the management team & staff