



January 2022 News

Hello Olifants community!

We hope you have all had an excellent festive period and have enjoyed this special time with those close to you. A new year has begun, filled with new opportunities and adventures. Let's make the best of it!

We are midway through summer and have been blessed with excellent rains so far. The Olifants river is in full flow through Balule as it snakes its way towards Kruger and further along into Mozambique.

Enjoy the first Newsletter of 2022!

THE GAME DRIVE

December has been incredible with sightings of big cats. We have had more lion sightings during December than many of the previous months. Three prides were regularly seen on the property during this period. Leopard viewing has also been excellent with a mating pair seen for a few days close to Warthog Pan. The big Klaserie pack of wild dogs visited us twice in the last month, providing some fantastic sightings of this 30-plus strong pack. General game viewing has been very good with many of the herbivores giving birth to their young, adding a playful dynamic to the herds. Birdlife is at its peak with great birds of prey being sighted all over the reserve and all the migrants being present.



Feature Article – Africa’s Deadly Beauty

All felids are beautiful. It is a shared trait made even more appealing by the uncanny impression that they are fully aware of their own allure. However, with its luminous eyes, bold facial markings and dramatic ear tufts, the Caracal is arguably Africa’s most exquisite cat. Our appreciation of the Caracal’s beauty goes back thousands of years and historians believe that Caracals were of considerable religious significance in ancient Egyptian culture, with sculptures guarding the tombs of pharaohs.



INTRODUCTION

The Caracal (*Caracal caracal*) is a medium-sized wild cat found throughout Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. They are slightly stockier than their Serval cousin and their robust bodies are covered in a uniform coat of burnished red. Their bottle-green eyes are lined by the kind of natural eyeliner that would make Elizabeth Taylor jealous, with thick black lines running down the sides of their noses, emphasising the elegant jawline. The name “Caracal” was inspired by their most distinctive feature, with the Turkish word “Karrah-ulak/coulac” roughly translating as “cat with black ears”. The outlandish ears combine with the Caracal’s overall aesthetic to emphasise the impression of a proud and no-nonsense cat.

The solitary and secretive feline is found in a wide variety of habitats but shows a preference for more arid areas with suitable cover. In wetter areas, it is primarily outcompeted by the Serval, while golden cats hold dominion over the central forested parts of the continent. Like Servals, the Caracal is usually classified as nocturnal, but in reality, they can be active at any time of the day, especially when the weather is cool.

QUICK FACTS

Shoulder height:	40-50cm
Mass:	7-19kg
Length (not including the tail):	71-100cm
Social structure:	Solitary
Gestation:	62-81 days
Life expectancy:	Around 10 in the wild

SETTING THE CAT AMONG THE PIGEONS

Like all members of the cat family, Caracals are efficient and deadly predators. They typically prey on small mammals and birds but can take down animals an astonishing two to three times their mass. Small they may be, but beneath the sleek red coats are muscles of steel, capable of launching these agile cats more than three metres into the air. This prodigious pouncing power is shared with Servals which generally use these leaps to catch ground-dwelling rodents by surprise, yet Caracals are experts at snatching up birds in flight. This is accomplished by a combination of exceptional depth-perception, an ability to twist and turn in the air, and proportionately enormous paws which spread open to expose needle-sharp claws.

The expression “to put the cat among the pigeons” may well be attributable to the Caracal’s bird-hunting prowess. Until the 20th century, they were kept and trained by the Indian elite to hunt small game. In keeping with the human competitive streak, this inevitably resulted in a desire to test whose Caracal was the better hunter. Caracals were set in arenas filled with pigeons, and bets would be placed on which one would kill the most.

NOT JUST PIGEONS

Caracals are extremely versatile and adapt their hunting style to the habitat and type of prey. While the ambush approach typifies most hunts, they are adept climbers and exceptional runners. In fact, this species is probably one of the fastest – if not the most speedy – members of the smaller cat species. They have been clocked at 80km/h and while they are not endurance runners, their stamina is usually more than sufficient to chase down the prey of choice.

CAT-CALLS

Though the Caracal's social and sexual lives are still relatively understudied, they are known to be solitary and territorial. There is a considerable degree of overlap between territories, the boundaries of which are marked with urine and claw scratching. Like Leopards, it seems that the territories of males are far more extensive than those of the females and encompass the territories of several different females. Territory size and Caracal density are dependent upon the resources available to them. When the habitat is suitable and prey is abundant, the territories will be smaller and the population density higher.

The bold facial markings and ear tufts are believed to play an essential role in visual communication within the species, but Caracals also display a wide variety of vocalisations. These include a kind of twittering "meow" as well as growls, hissing and purring. Adult males and females only associate when the female is in oestrus, which the female advertises through frequent urination.

PERSECUTED FELINES

The IUCN's Red List currently classifies the Caracal's overall conservation status as "Least Concern", but this is highly variable. Habitat loss and human expansion threaten most Middle Eastern and Asian populations, and these cats are thought to be close to extinction in North Africa. They are frequent victims of vehicle collisions and regularly come into conflict with livestock farmers.

Caracals are considered mesocarnivores/mesopredators – a loose grouping of medium-sized predators that include species such as foxes and jackals. These animals often prove to be highly adaptable to – and tolerant of – human encroachment. With the removal of competition from the bigger predators (which, by virtue of their size, are less resilient to human presence), such midrange carnivores seem to flourish. Unfortunately, this places them at a much higher risk of conflict with farmers. Caracals can and do kill livestock, though research shows that they prefer natural prey and that livestock is only utilised as a supplement.

As a result, in many parts of southern Africa, particularly South Africa and Namibia, Caracals are considered "problem animals" and are persecuted extensively in certain areas. As they are exceedingly challenging to count, the effects of this conflict are not fully calculated or understood. The Cape Leopard Trust currently has several research programmes to understand the extent of the problem and find solutions to mitigate it. Interestingly and almost counterintuitively, some farmers in parts of South Africa have been introducing Caracals to their farms in the hopes of reducing stock losses. This is because Caracals and black-backed jackals (also responsible for livestock loss) operate in direct competition, so the presence of one controls the numbers of the other – balancing out the system, essentially. The effectiveness of this approach has not yet been thoroughly evaluated.

PET CARACALS

Caracals are beautiful, they tame easily and are naturally expressive, which has led to surging popularity in the pet trade. Keeping pet Caracals is a tradition that goes back hundreds of years in many parts of Asia, but today exotic pet breeders are flourishing. It should go without saying that this breed do not make good pets. Without thousands of years of domestication, the instincts of any wild animal remain close to the surface and most end up in a rescue centre when the owner realises just how difficult to manage they genuinely are.

WHERE TO FIND ONE IN THE WILD?

Though they are widespread throughout Africa, the best places to see caracals are the more arid parts of southern Africa. Here they are the dominant mesocarnivore and sightings are far more common due to reduced vegetation cover. The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and Central Kalahari Game Reserve boast excellent sightings, as do many of the parks in Namibia.



Conservation

Security Update

We have reached another incredible milestone in protecting our rhinos where we completed a calendar year without a loss. This makes it 462 days since we last lost a rhino on Balule which is a new record over the past decade! We have worked hard during the festive period to minimize the threat level on the reserve with increased K9 gate checks throughout Balule, night thermal helicopter patrol flights and



intelligence-driven counter-incursions plans put in place. Currently, Balule is leading the charge with the least amount of poaching incidents recorded in the APNR reserves, which is something to be very proud of. The poaching problem is not going away and we suspect that around 400 Rhinos were killed in South Africa in 2021 (unconfirmed, official data is not available yet). December was a bloodbath with over 23 Rhinos being slaughtered for their horn in one of the worst weeks of the year.



At Olifants, we are continuing to develop our capabilities, methods and invest in technologies to ensure we stay ahead of the game. All of this is, of course, only possible due to the donations made by our incredible Olifants Family - and for this, we are eternally grateful.

Aliens Plant Focus – Mexican Sunflower (*Tithonia diversifolia*)

We are currently focusing on the control and removal of the Mexican Sunflower which has come up in large numbers this season, especially along the office floodplains and other hotspots throughout the reserve. Although it is a beautiful yellow flower, it is an alien invasive species that needs to be dealt with. Our team is currently manually removing this plant from the environment as much as possible.

Tithonia diversifolia is a herbaceous flowering plant that has been widely introduced as an ornamental and has escaped from cultivation to become invasive, mostly in disturbed sites, along roadsides and in ruderal areas near cultivation. *T. diversifolia* is a successful invader of new habitats through its tolerance to heat and drought, its rapid growth rates and its large production of lightweight seeds which are easily dispersed by wind, water and animals. Dormant seeds also remain viable in the soil for up to four months. Once established, *T. diversifolia* quickly forms dense stands with the potential to outcompete native vegetation and thus prevent the recruitment and growth of native plant species. Allelopathic activity has

also been reported for this species.

T. diversifolia is native to Mexico and Central America. It has been widely introduced throughout tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world and it can now be found cultivated and naturalized across South America, the West Indies, Africa, Asia, Australia and on many islands across the Pacific and Indian Ocean.

T. diversifolia was first recorded in China as an ornamental in 1936. It was first planted in Banna, a county in the Yunnan province. By the 1950s this bright species was planted in villages and along the roadsides across the Yunnan Province.

In West Africa, *T. diversifolia* was introduced with imported grains or as an ornamental and in Nigeria, *T. diversifolia* was introduced as a contaminant with imported seeds of maize. In Kenya, it was first introduced as an ornamental plant in the 1940s and has now spread to western and central provinces, coastal regions and parts of the Rift Valley. In South Africa, it was introduced as ornamental and was first collected within the Kruger National Park in 1953

Pom-Pom the Lion

The Lioness known as “Pom-Pom” has been separated from her pride and has been deteriorating in body condition over the recent months, This female is quite an old lioness and is more than likely nearing the end of her life. Nature will no doubt take its course when the time is right. During this phase of a lion's life, they can become quite dangerous as they are often too weak to hunt their natural prey and they start to look for easier takings. It is very important to be very cautious when she is around human habitations or was last seen around the units. Please do not put any unnecessary pressure on her at sightings during this last phase of her life. We are certain all members join us in saluting this once-magnificent matriarch who has provided many years of training and guidance to her offspring/entire pride as well as valuable “entertainment” to wildlife lovers who have watched her with great interest and respect for well over a decade.

Feeding of Wildlife

It is evident that wildlife is still being fed at Olifants River Game Reserve based on very unnatural behaviour around the units, reported by members. Animals being fed at units include Civets, Genets, Nyalas and Hyenas. One recent incident saw a Hyena enter a house on Madrid where a young child was sleeping. Thankfully the adults managed to move the Hyena (who sauntered out nonchalantly) from the house before any harm came to the child. Hyenas only start behaving in this manner once they are accustomed to a food source from humans. For your safety and theirs, please remember not to feed any wildlife, especially predators, from your units. This includes tossing bones or other food scraps into the bush. It would be terrible if we have an injury or death related to habituated animals on the reserve.

Please note the above also applies to the feeding of birds on the Reserve.



REACHING OUT

And just like that, another year is over and the festive season has come to an end – and we look forward to a new year of caring, sharing and upliftment.

ORGR CHRISTMAS PARTY

Sincere thanks to all the members who contributed to the wonderful Christmas party for staff. Together with our management team, they celebrated another year of hard work at ORGR with dancing, drinks, snacks, crackers and gifts for their offspring who joined in the festivities. As witnessed by those who saw the video on the ORGR Outreach Whatsapp group, great fun was had by all, thanks to a fantastic effort by our management!



BALULE OUTREACH TRUST

Southern Cross Bursary

Our two Grade 12 bursary students, Chantal Mnisi and Malebo Sekome, completed their IEB matriculation last year and we await their results with interest. The three grade 6 learners, Vusi Chiloane, Appreciate Magabe and Emmanuel Theko, all had a very good year last year and are moving on to Grade 7. The school has asked us again to contribute (as co-sponsors with Eco Children Klaserie) to their bursaries and have also requested that we consider sponsoring two further very promising grade 7 learners, Perseverance Mashaba and Lesibo Legodi, who will be starting at SCS this term.

Eco Children are sponsoring 50% of the tuition fees for all 5 learners and 75% of the boarding fees. The trustees have decided to provide the balance of 50% of the tuition fees but that at this stage we can only provide 12.5% of the boarding fees which would leave the balance of 12.5% for the school's account.

Only with the ongoing generosity of our donors, can we continue providing funds that will help create invaluable opportunities for these children.

The Charity Calendar remains as one of the biggest income generators to the Balule Outreach Trust with between R60 000 and R100 000 generated annually over the last 10 years.

SAME (South African Medical Expeditions)
SIGAGULE VILLAGE AFTER-SCHOOL CARE CENTRE
& MASEKE DROP-IN CENTRE



We also propose continuing to provide SAME and Maseki with monthly food parcels. Both of these organisations are extremely grateful for our vital ongoing support. If you would like to contribute to the Balule Outreach Trust, herewith bank details:

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

MEMBERS UPDATE



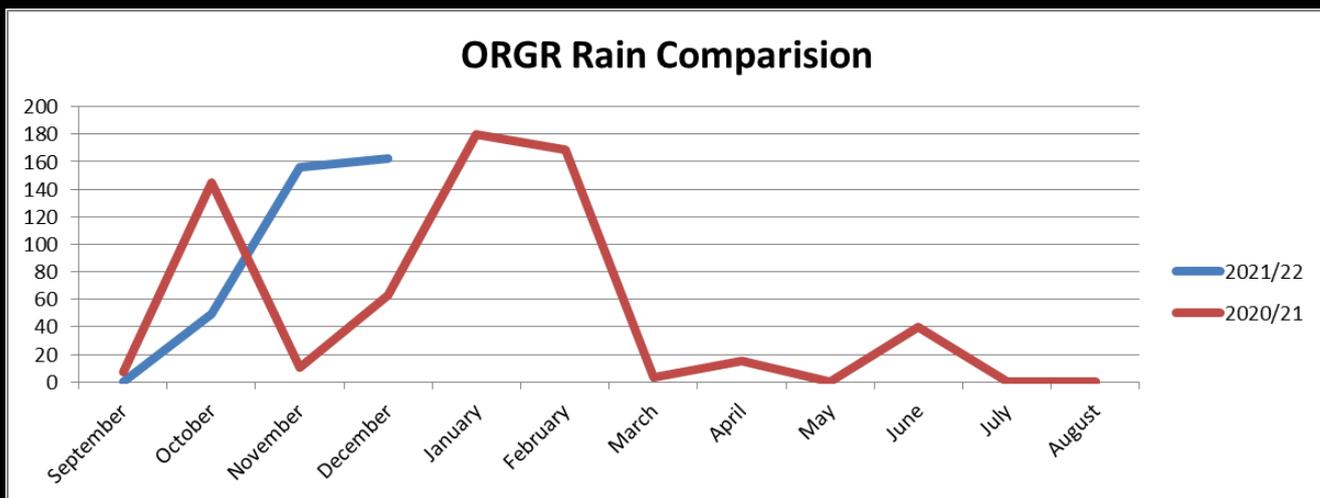
THE WEATHER REPORT

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, through to the mid-autumn season. Mostly above-normal minimum temperatures are expected across the country during late-summer and early-autumn, 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.

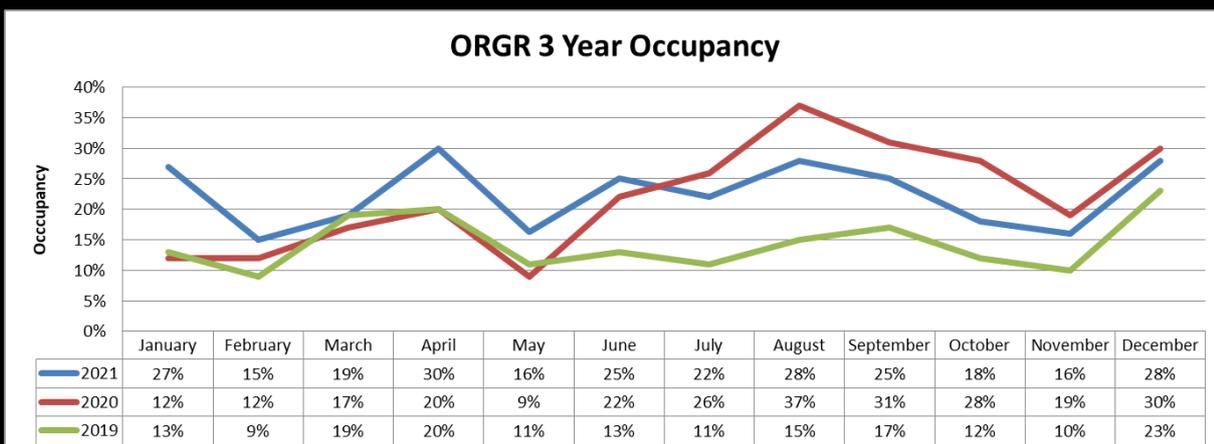
We have received 162mm of rain in December with a season total of 367.5mm so far.

Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season



OCCUPANCY

December saw 28% of the units occupied on average during the month with a peak of 42 units – and a low of 8 units - in residence. December started fairly quiet but occupancies quickly picked up during the second half of the month and we were at 50% occupancy for the festive period. The table below is a three-year comparison of occupancies on the reserve.



November Night Sky In a nutshell...

Moon

Date	Time	Phase
02/01	20h33	New Moon
09/01	20h11	First Quarter
18/01	01h48	Full Moon
25/01	15h40	Last Quarter

Moon – Earth Relations

Perigee: 358 033 km on the 02/01 at 00h55

Apogee: 405 805 km on the 14/01 at 11h35

Planet Visibility

Mercury is visible in the evening sky near Capricornus in the first half of the month, is at inferior conjunction on the 23rd, and is visible in the morning sky afterwards

Venus is visible in the evening sky near Sagittarius until the 9th, and passes into the morning sky afterwards

Mars is visible in the morning sky near Opiochus

Jupiter is located in Aquarius and is visible in the evening sky

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

Uranus is visible (with binoculars or a telescope) in the evening sky near Aries

Neptune is visible (with binoculars or a telescope) in the evening sky near Pisces

Meteor Showers

Several meteor showers are active in January. The Puppis-Velids are active from December 5th 2021 to January 7th 2022, peaking on the 29th of December 2021. The alpha Crucids, in the constellation of the Southern Cross (Crux) are active from the 6th of January to the 28th of January, peaking on the 19th. The alpha Centaurids, in the constellation of Centaurus, are active from the 28th of January to the 21st of February, peaking on the 7th of February. They are best viewed between 00:00 AM and 03:30 AM looking towards the constellation of Crux. Hourly rates are expected to be around 5 meteors per hour at the maximum.

Comets and Asteroids

Comet Leonard will still be visible from the 1st to the 9th of January in the southwest horizon between 21h00 and 21h40.

Asteroid 7 (Iris) will make a close approach to Earth on the 13th of January and can be observed in the constellation Gemini between 21h38 and 4h10.

New Management at Olifants North

ONGR has recently had some management changes. Please meet the new team and join us in welcoming them to the neighbourhood!

Terry Schulze - General Manager / Warden.
Terry joins ONGR after serving as the regional warden of Parsons for the past four years. He is excited about starting a new chapter with us and looks forward to empowering ONGR's skilled and motivated workforce to further deliver structured and productive services to the members.

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



Sandy Schulze - Guest Relations Officer:

Having been a maths teacher for as long as she can remember, filling the role of guest relations manager is an exciting new challenge with not a single dull moment for Sandy. On her off days, you can find her gardening or reading and spending time with Terry and their two daughters. Sandy and Terry will continue living in their home on Parsons which gives Sandy probably the best 8km commute in the country to work!



Hannes Van Niekerk - Maintenance Officer

Hannes is ONGR's newly appointed maintenance manager. Hannes is a qualified boilermaker by trade but is extremely excited to be using his skills to fulfil a lifelong dream of working in the bush. He is from Lydenberg (Mashishing) where his wife and children will continue to live while he works at ONGR.

Game Drive Etiquette Reminders

When out on a game drive please ensure that all animals have a right of way at all times. I have had several reports of vehicles pushing animals (specifically wild dogs and lions) off the road to pass. We have an excellent road network that allows for game drives to select a detour around a sleeping pride of lions without having to push them off the road to pass.

Olifants River in heavy flow

With all the wonderful rains we have received on the reserve, as well as the excellent rains we're experiencing in the Olifants River catchment area, the river has been flowing powerfully for some weeks now with the peak reaching about 1,2 meters below the Causeway.

This water has travelled for many hundreds of kilometres before passing through Balule. The Olifants River has its origin between Breyten and Bethal, Mpumalanga Province. It flows north towards Limpopo Province through Witbank Dam and then the Loskop Dam and is forced eastwards by the Drakensberg, cutting through at the Abel Erasmus Pass and then flowing further East across the Lowveld to join with the Letaba River. It crosses into Gaza Province, Mozambique, after cutting through the Lebombo Mountains by way of the Olifants Gorge, becoming the Rio dos Elefantes and finally joining the Limpopo River after 40 km before it enters the Indian Ocean at Xai-Xai north of Maputo.



Farewell to Colbert and Lucas

At the end of December, we said a sad farewell to Colbert and at the end of January, we will be saying goodbye to Lucas as well. These two gentlemen have retired from working at ORGR after a very long time of dedicated service to the reserve. Many of you will have fond memories of these two Olifants legends and they will be sorely missed. Colbert and Lucas, we wish you all the best in your retirement. Enjoy the peace!!



Final Word

"I love feeling the cold raindrops on my skin, And smelling the rain in the air that I breathe. I feel free when the wind plays intimately with my hair, And when it dances its way around me. I love when I taste the Bushveld morning, And when I can hear Africa awake. It brings me joy when I can see the beauty that each night brings, And when I can love the mighty stars in the night sky.

I love the African Bushveld with my eyes, But I can feel it with my heart."

By WriterByHeart

Well, that's all for now, folks! We wish you all the very best for 2022! Have fun, stay safe and we look forward to seeing you all in our beautiful piece of paradise!

Warm regards

Nick, the management team & staff