

THE BUSH TELEGRAPH

December 2019

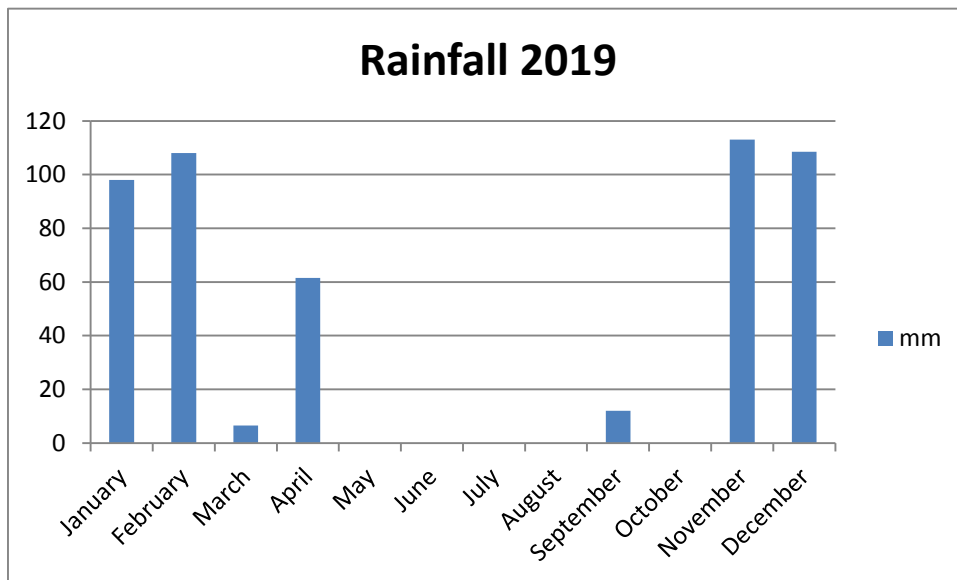


Dear members of the Olifants community,

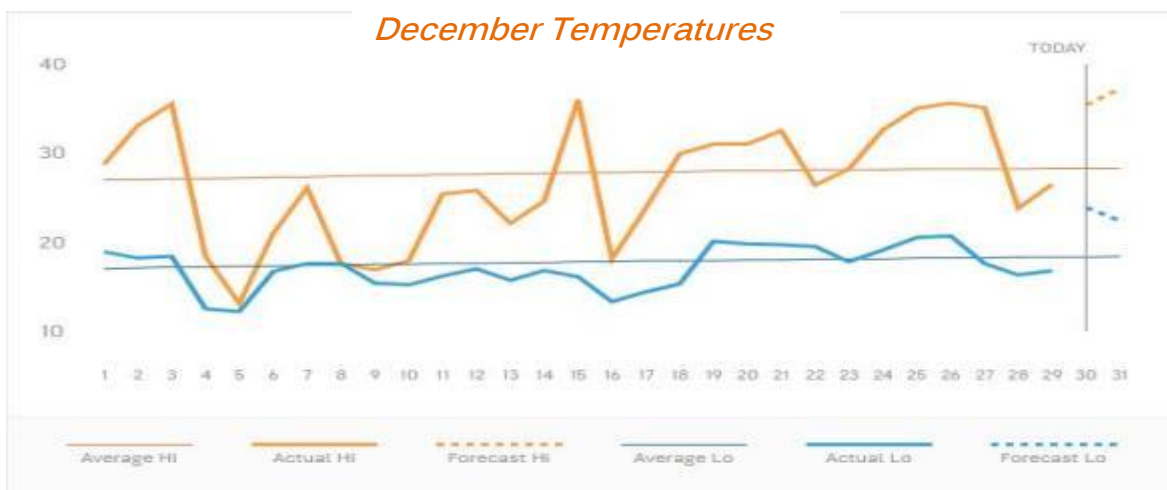
Another year has come to an end in our corner of Africa. We hope you all had a peaceful Christmas and are looking forward to a prosperous New Year. It has been a wonderful first Olifants Xmas for Kerry and I, having the reserve bustling with members and their guests during the festive season and seeing the Clubhouse pool extensively used during the Christmas heat wave. The reserve of course is brimming with life and all the greenery, babies, birds and insects that make a bushveld summer so special!

THE WEATHER REPORT

We have had a substantial amount of rain this December falling in a very short period. A total of 109 mm fell between the 8th and the 12th of December. We end the year on a total of 508mm and for the 2019/2020 season, 233mm has fallen so far with 3 more months of rainy season ahead. We can expect more rains in January and February.



Temperatures have been in the early to mid-thirties with a heatwave of 40 degrees plus engulfing us for a couple of days during Christmas. Thankfully the heatwave was followed by a few cooler cloudy days towards the end of the month.



The rainfall forecast for summer from the SAWS/NOAA-GFDL Multi-Model system indicates enhanced probabilities of below-normal rainfall over the north-eastern and southern parts of the country. With regards to temperatures, mostly higher than normal temperatures are expected for summer and early autumn.

OUR NIGHT SKIES

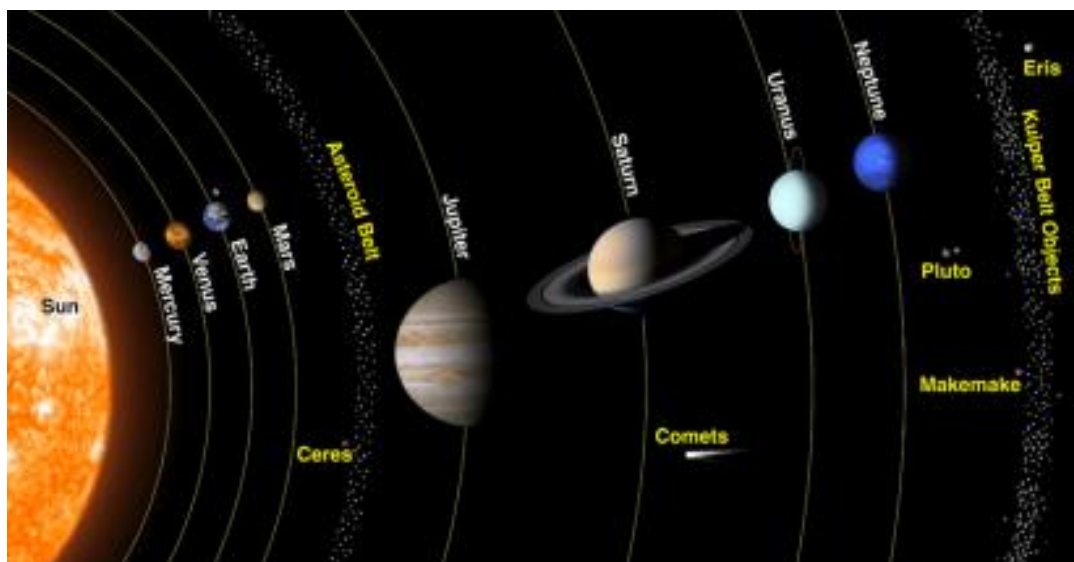
January 2020 planet guide

In January 2020, dazzling Venus lights up the early evening sky whereas moderately-bright Mars comes up before dawn. Late in the month, you might catch Mercury at dusk and Jupiter at dawn. Saturn, in the meanwhile, hides in the glare of the sun

The young waxing crescent moon joins up with Venus by the month's end. Use Venus and the lit side of the waxing lunar crescent to help guide you to Mercury's location near the horizon. Venus is the only bright planet to light up these January evenings all month long, although Mercury might fleetingly appear at dusk by the month's end. Some sharp-sighted people can even see Venus in a daytime sky.

Use the old waning crescent moon to find the red planet Mars before sunrise on January 19, 20 and 21, 2020. Mars is the only bright planet to adorn the predawn sky throughout January 2020.

Jupiter – the second-brightest planet – is nominally a morning planet all month long. Despite its brightness, Jupiter sits too close to the glare of sunrise to be visible in early January. By mid-month or so, look for Jupiter to appear above the sunrise point on the horizon as the predawn darkness gives way to dawn.



Follow this link for an interesting perspective of the size of various Celestial bodies:
<https://neal.fun/size-of-space/>

Conservation and Ecology

Privately owned Protected Areas are playing an increasingly important role in the management and conservation of South Africa's natural resources and biodiversity, and management activities must be undertaken with a purposeful long-term objective in mind. The management plans for the individual APNR reserves are compiled in terms of the National Environment Management: Protected Areas Act No. 57 of 2003 (NEM: PAA) and are presented as an adjunct to the Associated Private Nature Reserves (APNR) Management Plan. The APNR Management Plan has been approved by the relevant authorities in the Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces and provides the overarching principles and guidelines for the management of the greater protected area of which ORGR is a part.

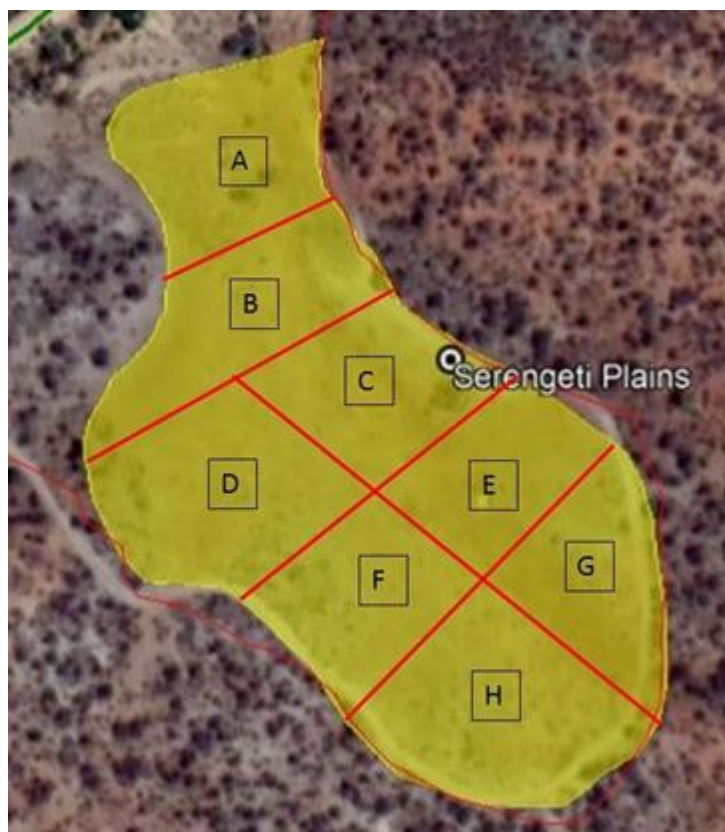
We are in the final stages in completing our Conservation Management plan for Olifants River Game Reserve. All the data and frameworks are all in place and we are just tweaking a few timelines on specific projects. One of these projects is the rehabilitation of “old lands”.

Experimental Rehabilitation Project.

Many areas like Warthog Pan for example, may look nice and green at the moment but when you look closer there are only bulbs and forbs dominating these areas. This is more than likely due to these areas being “old lands” with a heavily compacted top layer of soil which is preventing the indigenous grass species to grow. By ripping up the top layer of soil and reseeding these areas with indigenous grass seeds we hope to be able to restore natural grassland, prevent further erosion damage and diversify animal utilization of the areas. It is a very exciting project which will arm us with the correct methods to start rehabilitating various locations throughout the reserve.

We will be starting an experimental rehabilitation Project at Serengeti Plains in January to determine the best practice. The area will be divided into different sections which will receive different treatments to establish which rehabilitation methods are most effective in this particular area.

Conservation and Ecology



The purpose of the Experimental Rehabilitation Project is to test four 'treatments' for rehabilitation on the 'bare' areas on OGRG that are identified as 'old lands'. Serengeti Plains has been identified as a demonstration area using the following treatments.

- 1) Leave as is;
- 2) Cross Rip and leave;
- 3) Cross Rip and seed; and
- 4) Cross Rip, seed and fertilise with low rates as a booster to be phased out over three seasons

Plot	A ¹	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Treatment	1	3	1	4	2	4	2	3

The Following seed mix will be used in the rehabilitation project:

GRASS SPECIES	COMMON NAME
<i>Antheophora pubescens</i>	Wool grass
<i>Cenchrus ciliaris</i>	Blue buffalo grass
<i>Chloris gayana</i>	Rhodes grass
<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	Couch grass
<i>Digitaria eriantha</i>	Smutsfinger grass
<i>Eragrostis curvula</i>	Weeping lovegrass
<i>Eragrostis tef</i>	Teff
<i>Panicum maximum</i>	Guinea grass

Members can keep a close eye on Serengeti Plains over the next couple of months as the experimental project results will hopefully be very visual, with great implications for more extensive rehab opportunities across the reserve.

SIGHTINGS

The rainy season is notorious for delivering lesser game viewing due to the available water and thicker bush; but at ORGR game viewing has been off the charts!



There has been a group of 5 Buffaloes on the reserve recently. One of these old Dagga Boys has both his horn broken off and is now known as Scrum cap. They are moving between the Olifants River and Rhino pan. There has been an absence of these beasts on the reserve for some time and we are very happy to have them back.

Cat sightings have been excellent with the Pom Pom pride regularly sighted along Madrid and Grootdraai and the Mashatu pride residing around Sable and Rhino Pan. Other lions have also been sighted throughout the area and we suspect there is some change in social dynamics occurring.



A variety of leopard have also been regularly seen and have presented some great photographic opportunities; they always seem to know how to work the camera.

Thank you to Darryl Furman for this beautiful shot.

Elephants have dispersed somewhat since the arrival of the rain, (much to the delight of our Maintenance Team) but they are still present in smaller numbers and provide for some quality viewing. The Wild dogs have been a little scarce making only two appearances in December (including the last day of the year).

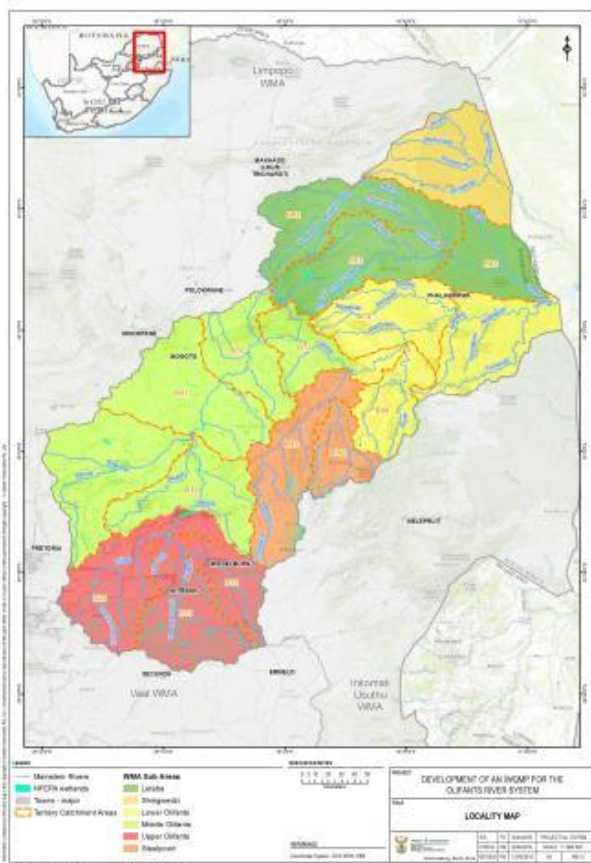
General game viewing has been wonderful with all the Impala, Warthog and Wildebeest calves/babies around. Giraffe, Kudu and Zebra are also plentiful on the reserve at present. Hopefully with the worst of the drought behind game numbers will continue to improve.

Olifants River Water Levels

On the 16th of December we saw a dramatic rise in the water levels in the Olifants River. At 07:31, Monique from unit 72 posted on the sightings group that the river had risen significantly in front of her unit. I headed down to the Clubhouse to check the water levels, but it was still very low. I rushed off to the Causeway to have a look, yet there was no change. A few minutes later I heard the water coming downstream before actually seeing it, and within 5 minutes the water level rose by almost 2 meters at the Bridge. It was an incredible sight to see. Take a look at this time lapse taken from unit 9, and thank you Peter Eastwood for sharing: <https://vimeo.com/380179262>



This was all the rain that fell in the upper Olifants catchment area the previous week. It took 7 days for the water to meander all the way downstream to the lower Olifants area. Although the water Levels increased very rapidly, the rate of increase peaked



The Olifants River catchment area covers 54,570 km². The Olifants River flows northwards through Witbank Dam down to Loskop Dam. The confluences of the Klein Olifants, The Olifants River flows from Loskop Dam some 80 km to Flag Boshielo Dam. The Moses and Elands Rivers join the Olifants River downstream of Loskop Dam from the west while the Bloed River joins from the east. The Steelpoort River confluences with the Olifants about 50 kilometres before the confluence of the Olifants and Blyde rivers, after which it confluences with Ga-Selati River on the border of the Kruger National Park.

CREATURE FEATURE: Amur Falcon

This month we focus on an incredible little raptor that is currently spending the next 4 months in Southern Africa and can be seen on Olifants River Game Reserve.



Migration Route: Amur Falcon

■ Breeding ■ Non-breeding

The Amur Falcon is a fascinating migratory raptor. Every year, the small, resilient birds make the daring voyage from breeding grounds in Russia and China to winter in southern Africa. It is supposed that the falcons cross the Arabian Sea during their migration, but much is still unknown about the patterns of their estimated 22,000 km migration. Because of the long journey, stopover sites are important for Amur Falcons to maintain stamina. In 2012 an estimated 120,000 to 140,000 birds were trapped in nets and killed while passing through a remote part of the Indian Nagaland region. This prompted a swift response from the Indian Government and the Nagaland Forest Department, which used patrols and education initiatives for villagers as a means to halt trapping. In 2013, no falcons were trapped.

The Amur falcon feeds mainly late in the evening or early in the morning capturing a wide range of insects in the air or on the ground. They capture most of their prey in flight, sometimes by hovering, but will also pick prey by alighting on the ground. The winter diet appears to be almost entirely made up of insects but they take small birds, mammals and amphibians to feed their young in their breeding range. The rains in Africa produce swarms of termites, locusts, ants and beetles that provide ample food. Their migration over the Arabian Sea coincides with the timing of the migration of dragonflies (*Pantala flavescens*) and these are thought to provide food during the most arduous part of their migration route.

CREATURE FEATURE: Amur Falcon

During migration they stay in open forest or grasslands, roosting colonially on exposed perches or wires. Their breeding habitat is open wooded country with marshes. The breeding season is May to June and several pairs may nest close together. Abandoned nest platforms belonging to birds of prey or corvids and even tree hollows are re-used for nesting. Three or four eggs are laid (at two day intervals). Both parents take turns to incubate and feed the chicks which hatch after about a month. The young birds leave the nest after about a month.

The Amur falcon breeds in east Asia from the Transbaikalia, Amurland, and northern Mongolian region to parts of North Korea. They migrate in a broad front through India and Sri Lanka, sometimes further east over Thailand and Cambodia and then over the Arabian Sea, sometimes in passage on the Maldives and other islands to reach southern Africa. Birds going over India are thought to be aided by strong winds blowing westward. These winds are strong at an altitude of about 3000m and the birds are thought to fly at a height of above 1000m during migration. The route taken to return to their breeding grounds runs slightly more northward.

SECURITY

Our worst fears came true in 12 of December when 2 poached White Rhinos were discovered on Zebra Drive. Despite this recent loss we are more determined than ever to make an impact on this war though our highly skilled, trained and equipped Anti-Poaching team. We are continuously adapting our methods and tactics to keep the poachers guessing where and what we are up to. The Christmas period has brought a surge of poaching incidents to the eastern Lowveld with both horned and dehorned Rhinos falling, which indicates an indiscriminant selection. Co-operation between the properties in Balule and our neighbouring reserves has been phenomenal.

We are continuously looking at new equipment, gear and tactics and we thank all of our Members for all the support over the years. We have installed an additional camera at the Southern Gate to cover the area between the railway line and the Tshukudu fence. This area has always been an unobserved gap which we have finally covered. We are now able to see anyone sneaking passed the gate or along the railway line.

I urge you all to report any suspicious behaviour, tracks, Vulture congregations and gun shots as soon as possible. We currently have 2 horned White Rhinos on the reserve which we care keeping a close eye on until the dehorning permits come through in early January 2020. We would also like to remind everyone that we want Rhino sightings called in on the radio. The more activity we have around the rhinos the better and by calling them in our Security teams know exactly where to focus the patrols.



ROADS & FACILITIES

Despite some heavy rain falling in very short periods, the road network has held up well. There has been some damage at various locations which we are in the process of repairing. After the big rains in December, all the cutline roads have been graded including the 4 Powerlines and various internal roads, and gullies and ruts repaired. The Airstrip has been graded and new drains opened to ensure a smooth landing for those members coming into the reserve by air.



The earth retaining wall at Big Dam took some substantial damage during the November and December heavy rains and we have had to spend a lot of time on the wall to strengthen it up again to ensure it does not wash away during the next bout of rains. We have strengthened the wall by packing additional soil along the back edge and further compacting the top surface with heavy machinery.

OCCUPANCY, RENOVATIONS & SALES

Below are the weekly occupancy averages for December 2019. It has been a busy month on the reserve during the festive season. Our busiest day had 36 units in residence and the quietest day had 7 units in residence at the beginning of the month

December – 2019					
	Occupancy	No of Units		Occupancy	No of Units
Week 1	11%	10	Week 3	27%	23
Week 2	22%	19	Week 4	37%	31

We have a few units on the market at the moment. This includes a third Share of Unit 22, third Share in Unit 54 and a full share of Units 76 and 83. Please contact the office should you have queries on units for sale.

OTHER MEMBER NEWS



We would like to thank Hayley from Unit 23 who donated all her savings to our Anti-Poaching team. You are a champion Hayley and every cent of your donations will be spent wisely to keep our Rhinos Safe.

With all the staff kids on the property during the Christmas season we set up a big screen Movie night with Popcorn to show the kids the new Lion King. It is a Disney classic with a very important conservation message embedded within. The kids had an absolute blast. The acclaimed Stroop Rhino poaching movie was shown to the adults and it was an eye opener for them to see how far reaching our Rhino Poaching epidemic spreads around the globe. Thank you Peter Eastwood from unit 9 for showing us both movies and assisting with the setup of your equipment.



Our Waste Management system is coming along nicely. Our recyclables Skip is on site and already in use. The organics composter pit is operational with only the roof left to install.

A reminder for all members to please separate their waste into two different bags, **Green** bags for Organics and **Black** bags for any recyclable waste.

The receptacles at Spaghetti junction are labelled to store the two different types of waste. At the main workshop please drop your **recyclables** into the Skip directly; it has a metal door to drop your bags in. Your **organic** waste can be placed in the cage at the workshop and our team will take care of it from there. Below is a guide as to how to separate your waste. Please ensure you give your **recyclables** a quick rinse under the tap to get rid of any sticky sauces from packaging.

Organic	Recyclables
Vegetable	Plastics
Meat	Glass
Bones	Tins
Tea Bags	Regular Paper
Coffee Grinds	Cardboard
Wooden Skewers and Toothpicks	Metal
Paper Towel and paper serviettes	

PROFILE OF THE MONTH

This month we feature Ronald Mashabana, a man you all know from the Olifants Workshop. He is always at hand for any issues with vehicles and really goes out of his way to excel in his duties.



Ronald was born and grew up in the Pafuri area in Mozambique , very close to the South African/Kruger border. In 1981 he managed to get a job at the ZZ2 Tomato farms in Mooketsi north of Tzaneen, where he worked for 6 years before finding a new opportunity in Pretoria with a building contractor. During his time in Pretoria the long arm of the law caught up with him as he was illegally working in South Africa and he was deported back to Mozambique in 1987. Over the next year he managed to get legal status and a South African ID and joined Olifants in 1988 working with Tim Ham. He initially started doing maintenance work at the Members units and later moved into the Workshop.

Ronald is married to Jane who works at Olifants in the Housekeeping department. They have 3 children together aged 22, 11 and 8 year old. Ronald loves Olifants. This place has taught him about the bush and animals and really enjoyed tracking wildlife.



The Olifants team also managed to get together on the afternoon of the 21st of December to celebrate Christmas together. It was a fun afternoon with lots of dancing, laughing and storytelling. A great time for us all to reflect on the past year and prepare ourselves for an amazing 2020 on Olifants River Game Reserve.

Finally we would like to welcome Zala to the Olifants Family. She has recently moved into the reserve with Callan. Although she is not an employee of ORGR, she is still part of our family and we love having her around. Zala is working for Balule Nature Reserve in various capacities including a new White Rhino monitoring program. Welcome to the Herd Zala!

We wish you all an incredibly successful Year ahead and hope that you have had an amazing Christmas together with family, friends and loved ones! All the best from the Olifants River Game Reserve Team!

