



## ORGR's BUSH TELEGRAPH

*THE FEBRUARY 2020 EDITION*

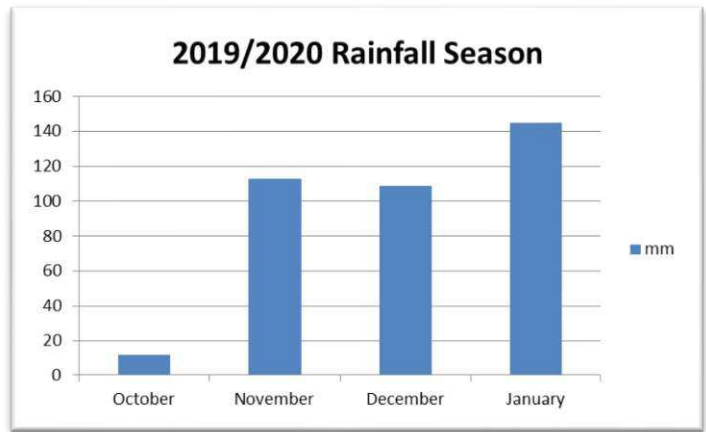


Dear Olifants Community

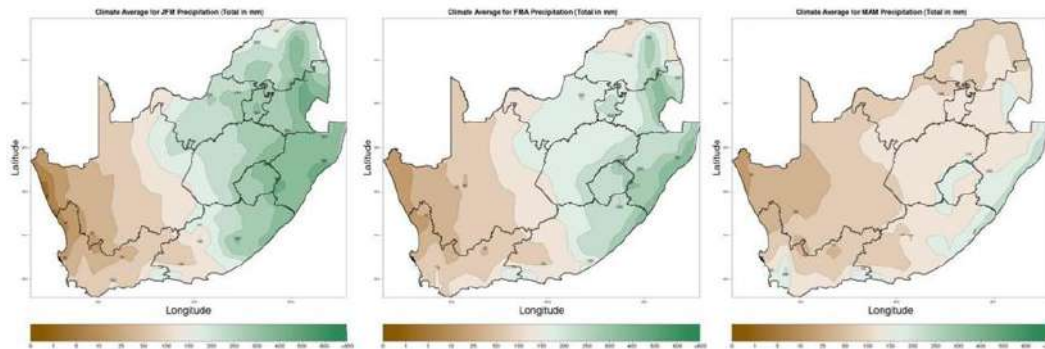
Happy New Year to you all and we hope you will make some incredible memories in 2020. We have had a marvellous festive season and have made many new wonderful acquaintances with our members and their guests. As well as incredible game sightings, the river has been flowing strongly, and the reserve is in the best condition it has been for many years. What a privilege it has been seeing it flourish like this. I would urge anyone who hasn't been to the reserve recently to make the trip as soon as possible.

# THE WEATHER REPORT

We received a whopping 145mm of rain in January during three events. 5mm on the 5th January, 80mm on the 10th, 58 mm on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 42mm on the 7th February. This brings our season total up to 380mm. The reserve is incredibly lush and green with excellent grass cover in most areas.

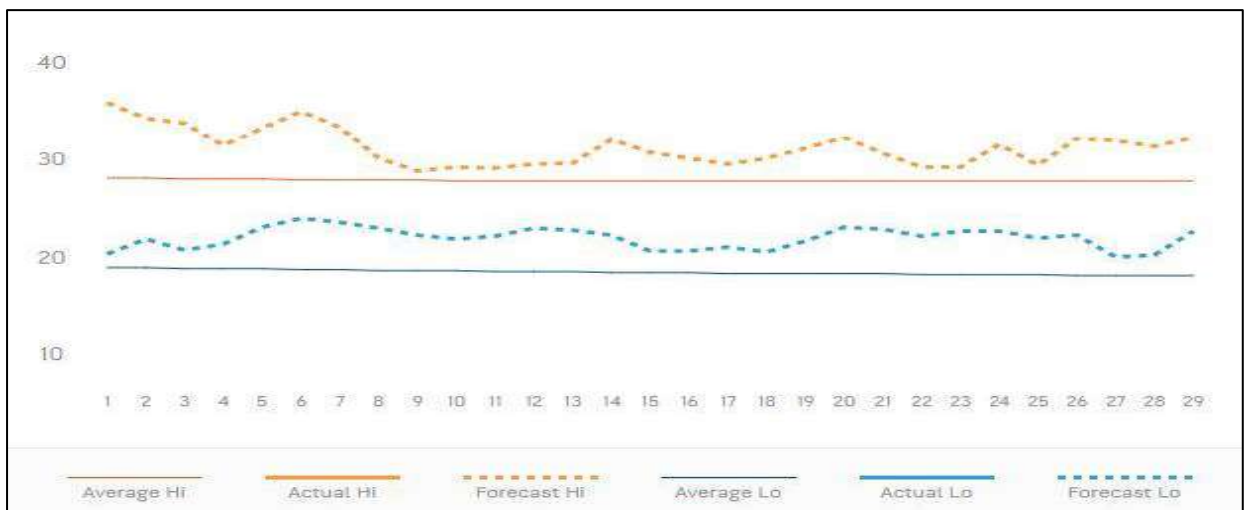


We are hoping that February will continue to bring good rains to the reserve to ensure our standing crass crop is well developed to support us through the drier months of the year. The long-range forecast predicts decent rains will fall until April which is great news.



Climatological seasonal totals for precipitation during Jan-Feb-Mar (JFM, left), Feb-Mar-Apr (FMA, middle) and Mar-Apr-May (MAM, right).

Temperatures in January have been mild compared to the extreme heat experienced at the end of December 2019 with the mercury hitting a maximum temperature of 34 degrees during the month. The forecast temperatures for February look to very similar conditions in January.



## THE GAME DRIVE



Game Viewing on Olifants has remained fantastic despite the bush thickening up during the mid-summer months. Most of the herbivores have had their young including Wildebeest, Zebra, Giraffes, Warthogs and the impala population has doubled with all the lambs around. Elephants have dispersed with plenty of available water and feeding around but sightings are still common throughout the reserve albeit in fewer numbers.



Lions and Leopard sightings have been very good throughout January with two prides of lions frequenting the property, one with young cubs that are now starting to move around with the rest of the pride. Our five resident Dagga boys still use Olifants as their regular stomping ground and can be seen between Palm Loop drive and Rhino Pan. All in all they seem very happy with life on the reserve.

Birdlife on Olifants is at its peak with all the summer and seasonal visitors and migrants present. Some special sightings have been White Backed Night Heron and Greater Painted Snipes. Keep an eye out for these incredible birds during your next visit.

**White-backed Night Heron**

*Gorsachius leuconotus*

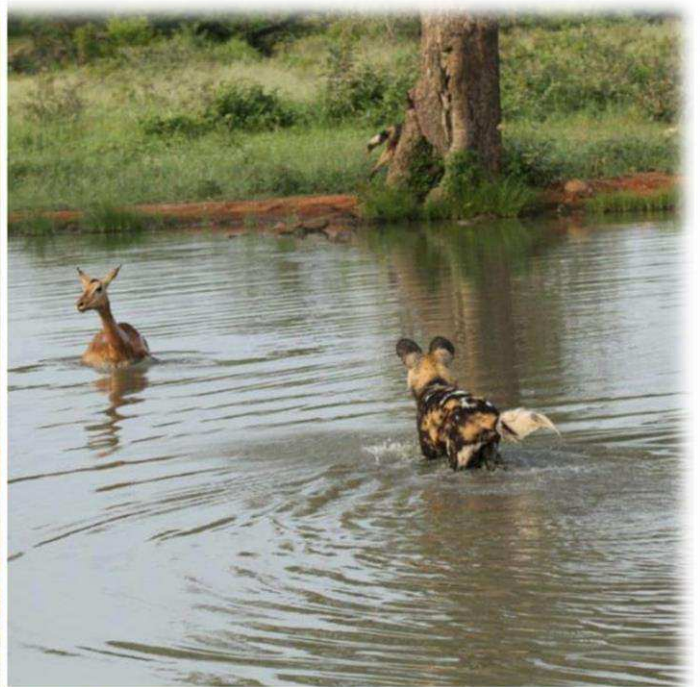


**Greater Painted-snipe**

*Rostratula benghalensis*



Nick Ryan had an incredible sighting at Rhino pan where he witnessed and photographed a pack of Wild Dogs hunt, chase and kill an impala in the water in front of the hide. An incredible moment captured in some very intense photographs.

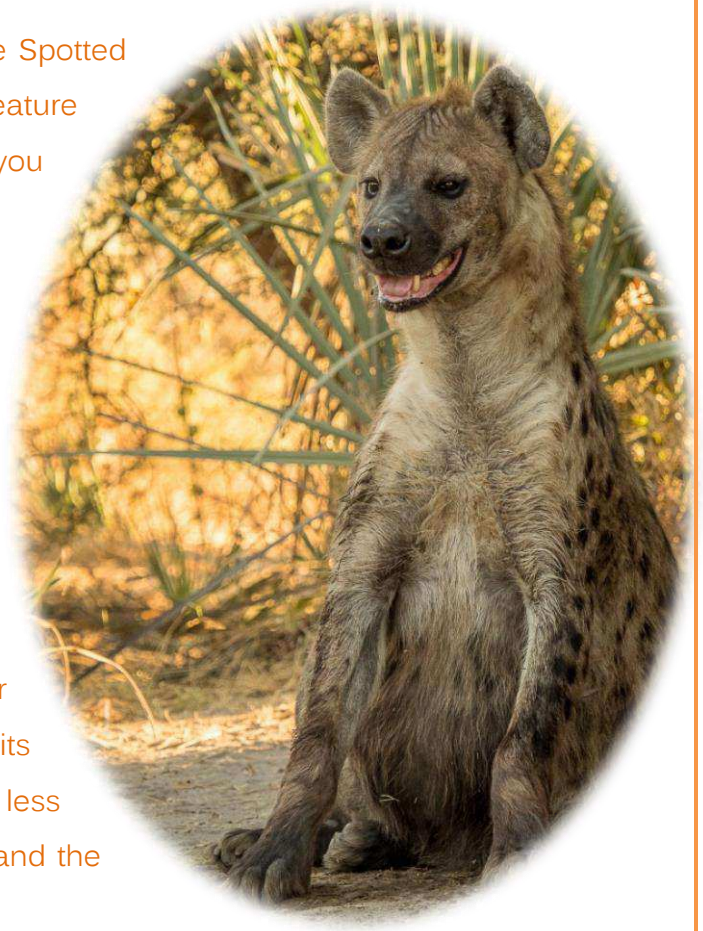


Thank you to Matt Stacey, Peter Eastwood and Nick Ryan for supplying photographs for the Newsletter. I encourage you all to share your amazing sightings with me via WhatsApp or Email.

## CREATURE FEATURE

This month we feature a firm favourite of mine, The Spotted Hyena. They are a weird and wonderfully unique creature that has captivated me from an early age. I hope you will find the following fascinating.

The spotted hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*) is the sole member of the genus *Crocuta*, native to Sub-Saharan Africa. It has a widespread range and large numbers estimated between 27,000 and 47,000 individuals. The species is experiencing declines outside of protected areas due to habitat loss and poaching. The spotted hyena is the largest known member of the Hyaenidae and is further physically distinguished from other species by its vaguely bear-like build, its rounded ears, its less prominent mane, its spotted pelt, its fewer nipples and the presence of a pseudo-penis in the female.



It is the only mammalian species to lack an external vaginal opening. In fact the genitalia of the female closely resembles that of the male; the clitoris is shaped and positioned like a penis, a pseudo-penis, and is capable of erection. The female also possesses no external vagina (vaginal opening), as the labia are fused to form a pseudo-scrotum. The pseudo-penis is traversed to its tip by a central urogenital canal, through which the female urinates, copulates and gives birth.

The spotted hyena has the largest group sizes and most complex social behaviours of any carnivore. Its social organisation is also quite unlike that of any other carnivore, bearing a closer resemblance to that of baboons and macaques with respect to group-size, hierarchical structure, and frequency of social interaction. It is openly competitive rather than cooperative, with regard to access to kills, and mating opportunities. Females care only for their own cubs, and produce some of the richest and most nutritious milk, enabling them to leave them for extended periods. Males display no paternal care. Spotted hyena society is matriarchal; females are larger than males and dominate them.

The spotted hyena is a highly successful animal due to its adaptability and opportunism; it is primarily a hunter but may also scavenge, with the capacity to eat and digest skin, bone and other animal waste. In functional terms, the spotted hyena makes the most efficient use of animal matter of all African carnivores.

The spotted hyena displays great variety in its hunting and foraging behaviour; it hunts alone, in small parties of 2–5 individuals or in large groups.

During a hunt, spotted hyenas often run through ungulate herds in order to select an individual to attack. Once selected, their prey is chased over a long distance, often several kilometres, at speeds of up to 60 km/h.

Spotted hyenas are social animals that live in large communities (referred to as "clans") which can consist of at most 80 individuals.

Females dominate males, with even the lowest ranking females being dominant over the highest-ranking males. High-ranking hyenas maintain their position through aggression directed against lower-ranking clan-members.

The offspring of dominant females automatically outrank adult females subordinate to their mother. However, rank in spotted hyena cubs is greatly dependent on the presence of the mother; low-ranking adults may act aggressively toward higher-ranking cubs when the mother is absent. Males associate more closely with their own daughters rather than unrelated cubs, and the latter favour their fathers by acting less aggressively toward them.

Territory size is highly variable. Home ranges are defended through vocal displays, scent marking and boundary patrols, and Clans mark their territories by either pasting or pawing in special latrines located on clan range boundaries. Clan boundaries are usually respected; hyenas chasing prey have been observed to stop dead in their tracks once their prey crosses into another clan's range.

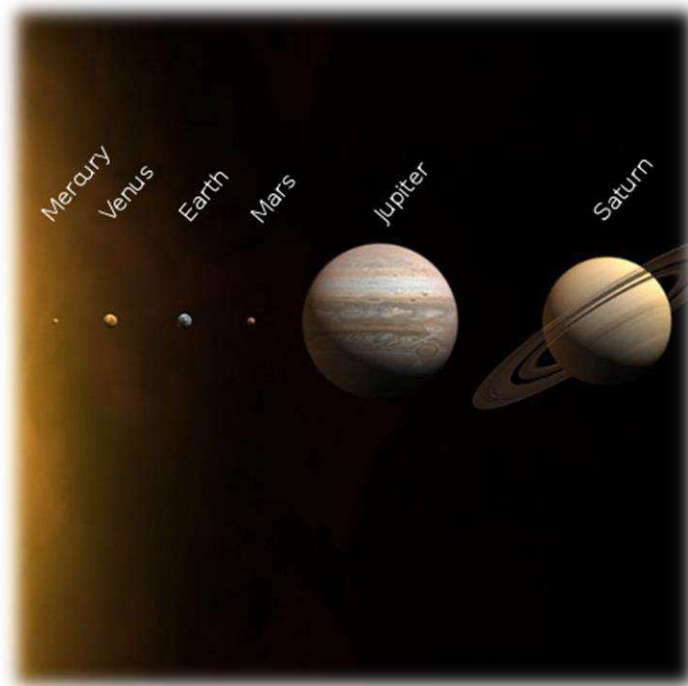
The spotted hyena has an extensive vocal range, with sounds ranging from whoops, fast whoops, grunts, groans, lows, giggles, yells, growls, soft grunt-laugh, loud grunt-laugh, whines, and soft squeals. Typically, very high-pitched calls indicate fear or submission, while loud, lower-pitched calls express aggression. The pitch of the laugh indicates the hyena's age, while variations in the frequency of notes used when hyenas make noises convey information about the animal's social rank.

Lastly as one can generally observe hyenas are extremely intelligent creatures. A study done by evolutionary anthropologists demonstrated that spotted hyenas outperform chimpanzees on cooperative problem-solving tests; captive pairs of spotted hyenas were challenged to tug two ropes in unison to earn a food reward, successfully cooperating quickly without prior training.



## OUR NIGHT SKIES FORECAST

In February 2020, you will be able to see all five bright planets, two after sunset and three before sunrise. By bright planet, I mean any solar system planet that's easily visible without optical aid and that's been watched by our ancestors since time immemorial. In their outward order from the sun, the five bright planets are Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. And they really are bright and noticeable in Earth's sky!



Venus and Mercury appear in the west not long after the sun goes down. Then see the three-morning planets – Mars, Jupiter and Saturn – in the east before daybreak.

Venus, the sky's brightest planet, pops out some 30 minutes after sunset and is the 3rd-brightest celestial object to light up the sky, after the sun and moon. Once you spot Venus, watch for Mercury to appear beneath Venus. Now is your best time to catch Mercury after sunset. Mercury reaches its greatest elongation from the setting sun on February 10, 2010, and, what's more, shines more brilliantly than a 1st-magnitude star. (Even so, super-brilliant Venus outshines Mercury by some 30 times.)

Given an unobstructed horizon in the direction of sunrise most everyone worldwide should be able to spot both Mars and Jupiter before dawn (about 90 minutes before sunrise). Keep in mind that an imaginary line drawn from Mars and past Jupiter points to Saturn's place near the horizon. Saturn, which is as bright as a 1st-magnitude star, will be rising earlier and earlier all month long. Happy Star gazing!

# CONSERVATION MATTERS

## #1 LAND REHABILITATION PROJECT

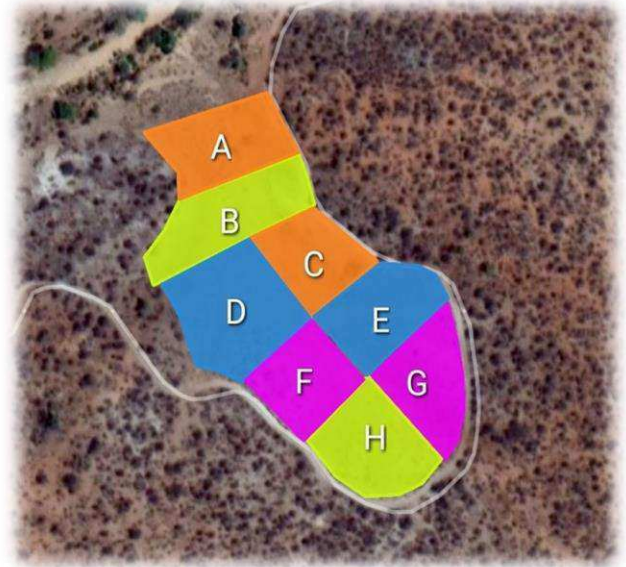
Our experimental rehabilitation program has been completed at Serengeti Plains. Now, all we have to do is give it some time and let nature work her magic.

The damaged land at Serengeti has been divided into 8 different blocks with 4 different treatments. Blocks A and C have been left as is, B and H have been ripped and seeded, blocks D and E have been ripped, seeded and fertilized and blocks F and G have just been ripped.

These experimental blocks will indicate to us what the best method of rehabilitation is for this situation and environment so we are able to roll out further rehabilitation programs throughout the reserve.

The seeds used are coated in a brightly coloured protein to give them the best chance of germination. The colourful appearance also assists us with a visual indication of the spread rate of the seeds. We used an indigenous mix of grasses which includes Wool grass, Blue buffalo grass, Rhodes grass, Couch grass, Smutsfinger grass, Weeping Lovegrass, Teff, and Guinea grass.

A temporary electric fence has been erected to exclude grazing animals from the site to ensure we get optimum growth potential from the site. It may look a little unsightly now but this will change once we see the area rehabilitating over the next couple of months. We will keep members posted with visual evidence of our experiment's progress.

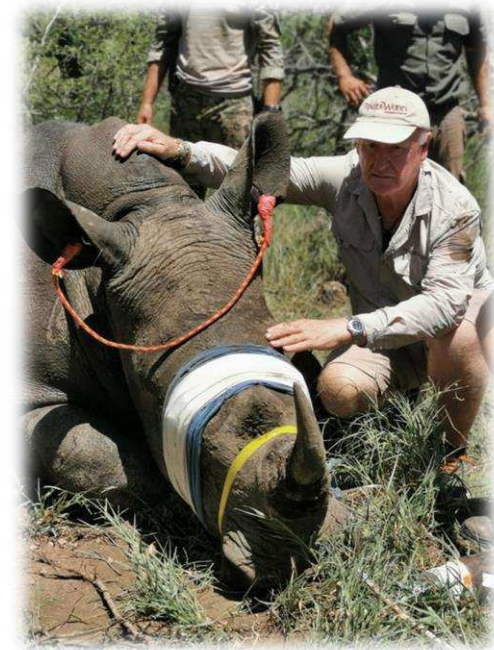


## #2 RHINO NEWS

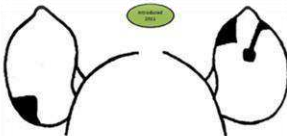

We had two Horned White Rhinos on the property during December and the beginning of January. Unfortunately due to the festive season, there were no permits available to dehorn the animals. We kept a very close eye on them during the festive period and monitored them daily. Permits were issued on Monday the 13th of January 2020 and we launched an extensive search at first light to locate them.





A fixed-wing aircraft was used to fly grids over ORGR, MRNR, York and Olifants West. The plane was supplemented with ground teams on foot and in vehicles as well as a Helicopter. Unfortunately, nothing was found. The following day one of the Bulls was found and dehorned in Olifants West. The Big bull reappeared in the area on the 28th of January and was photographed by Peter Eastwood. He is an absolute beauty. On the 31st of January, he was located in MRNR and Balule managed to dehorn him amongst two more horned Rhinos in Pridelands. That's a total of 4 Rhinos dehorned on Balule in January. Very many thanks indeed to the members who have supported these dehorning efforts.



In the Black Rhino world, Move and her calf Moremi have been sighted twice this month around Wild Dog Pan and Zolisa was also sighted on Shortcut road close to the airstrip. Move and Moremi have been seen with another Black Rhino but unfortunately, we do not have a positive ID on that animal, possibly Zolisa or Aphela. Here are their ID kits below. Please send photos/location/time sighted details through to me.

	
Number: 218	Number: 217
Name: APHELA	Name: ZOLISA
Sex: Male	Sex: Male
Date of Birth: September 15, 2007	Date of Birth: July 15, 2007
Mother: Priscilla	Mother: #380
Notes:	Notes:

	
Number: 221	Number: 222
Name: MOVE	Name: MOREMI
Sex: Female	Sex: Female
Date of Birth: May 15, 2006	Date of Birth: May 15, 2006
Mother: Clotile	Mother: Clotile
Notes: In horns for 5 weeks prior to translocation.	Notes: In horns for 5 weeks prior to translocation.

### #3 MORE RHINO NEWS

I am very happy to share news of our orphaned White Rhino calf, Thamani. If you recall she was orphaned early last year just prior to the dehorning exercise.

Thamani - "Our Precious" - has really done well at Rhino Revolution and seems incredibly well adjusted.

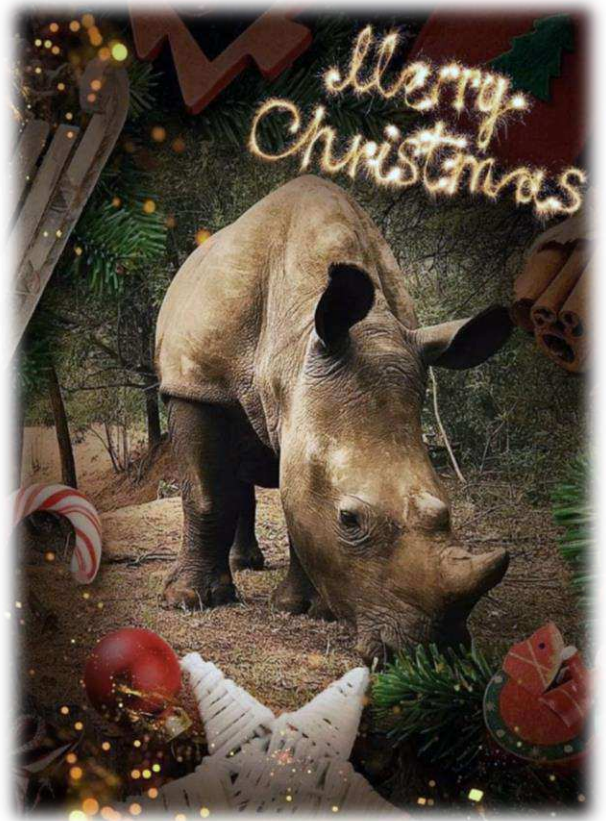
She had really battled early on due to the loss of her mother and there were times when we weren't sure if she would make it.

We then partnered her with a young male Rhino orphan called "Buttercup" to provide her with company and help her gain confidence, and this has worked a treat!

These two have become completely inseparable and Buttercup's owner has indicated that he would like to move Buttercup back to his farm which is a well secured environment in the area.



Thank you to all members and friends of Olifants all for the support you have provided Thamani to date, ensuring her survival and hopefully a long and happy life.



Thankfully he has agreed to take Thamani along given the amazing bond they have formed. To separate these two now would be disastrous. We will arrange to visit Thamani from time to time and will continue to keep our members updated on her life growing up. In around 2-3 years' time when she reaches sexual maturity we may consider bringing Thamani home to Olifants. For now she is safe and sound.

## #4 SECURITY

After a very hard December in which we saw two white rhinos poached on ORGR in one incident, we are very happy to report an incident-free January 2020. It was a tough month due to the fact that we had the two horned white rhino bulls on the property, but thankfully we managed to keep them out of harm's way. Although we experienced no incidents, as well as no incursions, we are still experiencing the aftershock of the poaching incident that occurred in December 2019.

We recently conducted our bi-annual polygraphs on ORGR, these polygraph tests were incident specific to the poaching incident that occurred on ORGR in December 2019.

Sadly two of ORGR's APU members failed two consecutive polygraphs, which resulted in their contracts being terminated. This has come as a shock to the team and it shows how far-reaching the tentacles of the syndicates run. The good news is we are able to pick out the rotten apples with our series of tests and get rid of them before any further damage is done.

Very recently the ORGR APU acquired 10 new camera traps through the ORGR Rhino Fund.

Each camera trap came with both an external battery pack (6-month battery life) and a signal booster (can acquire cellular network anywhere). All 10 cameras have been set up in the bush on known poacher routes. This is a fantastic upgrade to our perimeter defences with images automatically sent to management when triggered enabling a very rapid response.

ORGR has also contributed R20 000 to the training of a new Balule tracking dog named Nyaleti based on our neighbour's property for use across the region.



Thanks once again to all who have donated to the AP fund. Your donations are making a huge difference and it really makes our lives easier in this difficult task of Anti-Poaching.

# THE MEMBERS UPDATE

## UNIT #78 CARPORT FIRE

We had a serious fire incident on January 5th when the Ryan's unit #78 carport was struck by lightning and burned to the ground, along with the vehicle inside it. Luckily the wind direction was favourable and the main house was not threatened. Although the team responded as rapidly as possible the challenges posed by this incident gave us pause for thought, and we are going to upgrade our fire-fighting equipment and streamline our emergency response processes as a result.

## ENTRY GATE UPGRADES

We are in the process of upgrading the process at the Southern Gate. There is a new electronic scanner system that reads Vehicle Licence discs and personal Identification documents/cards. This new system is intended to streamline access, enable us to have accurate entry records and increase our security on the reserve as a whole. Members' details will be loaded on the system and eventually all guests and contractors will be required to pre-register access once the system is stable and operational.

## ROADS

Despite the 145mm of rain received in January, the road network is in good shape. It's currently a repair and repeat situation as the rain has not been falling evenly. Instead, it has been falling in larger quantities in fewer events which causes more damage to the roads. We started using a new wet drag technique where we drag tires the day after rain to smooth out the surfaces. It is proving to be working very well.

Numerous roads across the reserve were graded and/or repaired in the course of the last month. .

## OCCUPANCY

The average occupancy for the month of January was 12.5% with an average of 11 Units in residence. Peak occupancy for January was 37 Units on the first of January. The first half of January was still very busy and it quietened down dramatically at mid-month once the festive period had ended. Our lowest occupancy on the reserve was 2 Units.

January 2020					
	Occupancy	No of Units		Occupancy	No of Units
Week 1	29%	24	Week 3	4%	3
Week 2	13%	11	Week 4	7%	7

## GIN SALES

Our ORGR Gin stocks are now almost depleted with about 100 units remaining. Should members wish to stock up with what will surely be a collector's item they should place orders and reserve their stock ASAP.

This excellent gin was awarded 2 Double Gold Medals at the Michaelangelo 2019 Awards (albeit under a different name), and has been a fun fundraiser that has enabled members to give whilst receiving!

We have raised about R150K from this project and want to thank all the gin supporters for their efforts. Cheers!

## CLASSIFIEDS

We have two units on the market at the moment. This includes a full share of Unit 76 and a full share of Unit 83.

Please contact the office should you have queries on units for sale.

## BALULE OUTREACH

On the community side, the Balule Outreach Trust donated some much-needed stationery to the Kids at the after school child care centre in Sigagule Village. The Smiles on the faces of the kids says it all! The centre is run by Shirley-Anne and Frank Beretta through an NGO and our trust has been supporting this incredible establishment for some time. Once again a big thank you to all who have supported this initiative!



# THE LAST WORD

## STAFF PROFILE OF THE MONTH

This month we feature one of our incredible Housekeeping Ladies, Eunice Sinkie Phale. She was born in Acornhoek and is a single mother of one child named Tshepo. She was raised by a single mother amongst 8 siblings. Despite challenging circumstances growing up, she has a very high level of self-confidence and believes in herself.

She has some experience in running a small business and strives for customer service. She heard about Olifants River Game Reserve from a woman who told her we were looking for someone to join the team. She started working on the reserve in 2008 and is consistently hardworking and disciplined team member. She is a pleasure to work with and a valuable member of our incredible ORGR Family.



That's all for this edition of The Bush Telegraph. We are all looking forward to an incredible year on this slice of Africa we call home, together with some amazing people and creatures great and small.

Catch you on Sunset plains for a Sundowner soon!

All the best, Nick and the ORGR team

