



ORGR BUSH TELEGRAPH

THE AUGUST 2020 EDITION



Hello Olifants Community!

We hope you are all well and are staying safe. We are heading into the last quarter of the year and Spring is on our doorstep. Spring represents regrowth after the long dry winter; this is not only true for our reserve but for our country which is entering a phase of recovery after a long hard lockdown. President Cyril announced on the 15th of August the lifting of certain restrictions including provincial travel which is great news for us all.

We are delighted to welcome some new members to our Olifants family this month. Welcome to Alistair and Debbie Pearce who recently moved into unit 78 and to Shaun Dunlop, Hudson Raath, and family who have moved into unit 83. May you make memories of a lifetime on this special reserve.

AGM FEEDBACK

We recently held our first virtual and successful AGM on ZOOM. Despite some anxiety on how we would cope with the technological challenges, it all went off very smoothly in the end. This may well become the new normal for AGM's as members from around the country and beyond were able to join, some for the first time.

Ian Penhale and Sean Joubert presented an update on the company's strategy and the financial position and forecast respectively, providing clarity on both our current and forecast position. There are 2 slides in particular to call out.

Firstly, the visual summary of 2019/2020 highlights was impressive, as it captures just how much has been accomplished over the last year or so. We can be proud of the progress we have made in so many facets of the reserve and its operations. Many thanks to the Board, management, staff and members who helped make this happen.



Secondly, the ORGR Strategy Framework was presented which clearly articulates the company's Vision, Mission, Strategic Pillars and key Enablers necessary to achieve our ambitions. This strategic choices and activities we are undertaking within each focus area were also outlined in some detail, and we are really looking forward to maintaining our momentum in the year ahead! Exciting times.

ORGR STRATEGY FRAMEWORK



Finally, we would also like to welcome Sue Harwood who was elected to join our Board of Directors - we are excited to have your passionate commitment driving our essential Outreach initiatives. And of course we bid a fond farewell to Chris Thomas who leaves the Olifants board to explore new horizons in Oz. Thank you Chris for your time, commitment and dedicated service to Olifants!

THE GAME DRIVE

We have had some incredible sightings over the last months. The Cheetah have returned; the two males we saw last year as well as a female and her cub. They have been seen on multiple occasions around Sable Dam and Rhino Pan. Good news on the Ostrich front, our lonely male is no longer the only ostrich on ORGR. A female was recently sighted wandering through the area and we hope they find each other. Wild dogs have been on the reserve on several occasions in the last month, completing our magnificent seven species seen on Olifants. Elephants numbers are slowly increasing as the environment around us gets drier and they are lured towards the permanent water of the Olifants River and watering holes. The herds have been very relaxed in the area. Ezulwini, the super tusker, has been sighted on our southern boundary recently!

Many thanks to all the contributors of beautiful photos on the Olifants Sightings Group. Keep them coming!



CONSERVATION MATTERS

RHINO NEWS

We have increased Rhino activity on the reserve which is great and indicates a positive trend with our local population. Sightings for members have improved as a consequence. Black Rhino are less frequently seen but we know of 4 individuals that utilize the ORGR region regularly.

We are also happy to report the birth of a new White Rhino calf who is frequently seen around the Wild Dog Pan area.



Please note that we encourage members to call in Rhino sightings on the radio, despite my recent email stating otherwise. There was a copy-paste error from an old document.!

RAILWAY ECOLOGY STUDY

Since the establishment of the reserve, the railway has been the source of conflict, with trains killing indiscriminately from frogs and tortoises to elephants – most recently last week. We have yet to understand why certain areas have far more collisions than others. In this regard we have started an extensive research program into railway ecology. Transfrontier Africa, together with the Endangered Wildlife Trust have set up the first rail



ecology workgroup in Africa to understand better how railways impact species. This will help us identify key issues and hopefully result in practical management solutions to reduce or even eliminate future collisions. The first phase of the research was conducted in Jan-Feb 2019, and this has led to the current study which is running from May 2020 until May 2021.

Using camera traps we will be recording the presence and densities of mammals in a gradient from 500m away to the railway and then 500m the other side. As we suspect vegetation and resultant visibility plays a big role, three broad habitat types have been identified along the railway. Each one will be monitored using 60 cameras for 2 months during the dry season and 2 months during the wet season. This will provide valuable information into when and why certain species choose to spend time close to the railway and what we can do to prevent collisions.

ARBOR WEEK



Arbor Day is a designated day on which individuals and groups are encouraged to plant trees. Today, many countries observe this concept.

South Africa celebrates Arbor Week in the first week of September annually. The Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (DAFF), as the custodian of forestry in South Africa, is responsible for the campaign. We have had an overwhelmingly positive response on this initiative with over 160 trees on order from our member base. We will be very busy bees during the first week in September planting the Marula and Mahogany trees around the sponsor Units. We will do our best to protect the planted trees but the reality is there will be some casualties along the way, such is the nature of nature. Thank you to all of the members who have supported this initiative!

"Time spent amongst Trees is never wasted"

FIREWOOD

It had to happen eventually! We have finally depleted our natural stock of firewood from under the 4 powerlines. The harvesting of firewood wood from the reserve is neither legal nor sustainable in a protected area. We have bought in a sustainable firewood source as a replacement. The wood is of good quality and makes fantastic braais and boma fires. The new supply is from a community project removing an alien invasive species that happens to be great for firewood. The species of tree we are getting is *Casuarina equisetifolia*.



SARCOPTIC MANGE

With the peak of the dry season approaching, we can expect to see Impala with signs of sarcoptic mange again on ORGR. Sarcoptic mange, caused by the mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*, is a globally-distributed, infectious disease of wildlife that has been reported in greater than 100 species of mammals. The sarcoptic mite burrows deep into the epidermis, causing inflammation, intense pruritis and, in advanced cases, a perturbed skin barrier that may result in death due to secondary infection, dehydration and impaired thermoregulation. We have only been seeing this condition occur on Impala in the area. Treatment of wild animals with mange is not necessary when it affects an abundant and healthy population like Impala. Should threatened species or species with low population numbers be affected, treatment is advised. We can euthanize any impala we feel is suffering due to the condition if need be, but for the most part, nature sorts itself out.



CREATURE FEATURE: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Take, for example, the *Cyclocephala nodanotherwon*, which is a type of rhinoceros beetle in the scarab family that was described by Ratcliffe in 1992. Unless you are a scientist or particularly observant, go back and read the species name (the second word) again and enjoy Ratcliffe's sense of humour in the knowledge that by the time it was described, 290 other members of that genus had already been identified. "Not another one" – get it?



It became very clear from very early on in the forays into the world of biological and scientific study that living creatures come in distinctive shapes and sizes and that it would be necessary to find a way to convey both similarities and differences between species through naming. With the help of Gaspard Bauhin and, more famously, Carl Linnaeus, the system of scientific names gradually evolved to the point we have reached today. Binomial nomenclature is essential to our understanding of where each species fits into the great taxonomical hierarchy and works, in theory, to ensure certainty within the biological community.

Every mammal, bird, plant, fish, frog, algae, fungi (and so on) is designated both a capitalised generic name referring to its genus and a specific name/epithet that identifies which species it is. Now governed by a strict code, this naming system relies mostly on Latin and Classical Greek words to create a descriptive basis for each given name and it is in these meanings that the secret gems of the scientific naming system can be found. Small references to the biology of the animal can be a useful way of remembering the scientific name, but there are also tantalising glimpses into history and, on occasion, insights into the scientists doing the naming.

These days, people generally don't throw scientific names into casual conversation unless they either work in a particular industry or are contriving to be as pretentious as possible but understanding the etymology behind a name adds an entirely different dynamic.

Looking at the Big 5.

African bush elephant – *Loxodonta africana*

From the Greek word "loxós" meaning slanting, or crosswise, and "odoús" meaning tooth – referring to the grooves in an elephant's molars. The *africana* part is relatively self-explanatory (though those interested should read up about the fascinating debate around the history of the name "Africa")



White rhinoceros – *Ceratotherium simum*

“Cerato” meaning horn, “thorium” meaning wild beast and “simum” meaning flat-nosed – all come together to describe a horned wild beast with a flat nose.

Black rhino – *Diceros bicornis*

Named by Carl Linnaeus himself in 1758, there is some historical confusion as to how it came about, but it is believed that he based his classification on the skull of a (single-horned) Indian rhinoceros with an added artificial horn. He was clearly very taken with the idea of two horns, as the scientific name of the black rhino literally translates as “double horn” “double horn”. Imagine Linnaeus’ reaction had he not turned down a visit to South Africa on the basis that he didn’t really like the heat..



Lion and leopard – *Panthera leo* and *Panthera pardus*

There is some disagreement as to the etymology behind the word *Panthera* – it is most likely derived from a Sanskrit word meaning pale yellow but may also have been a reference to the hunting nets used by Roman soldiers.



Cape Buffalo – *Syncerus caffer*

“Syn” meaning together and “keras” meaning horn – together refers to the shape of the base of the buffalo’s horns (the boss). The species name refers to the Latin meaning from, or of, “Caffraria”, the name given to the African continent.

The ‘boss’ clearly evident in this Cape buffalo – *Syncerus caffer* (together-horns from Africa)



THE SECURITY REPORT

We are extremely happy to report another quiet month on the security front.

ROAD CLOSURES

The closure of the northern cutline during our full moon period as our detection zone has worked incredibly well and greatly assists our APU in early track detection.

K9

Both K9's are doing exceptionally well. Jan is currently running on 5-hour old tracks as his standard exercise, which is unbelievable. Little Page, when she is not the public relations officer of ORGR, is currently doing 3-hour old tracks with absolute ease and will be pushed up to 6-hour old tracks in due course.

These hounds are an incredible asset and have firmly set our APU unit as a force to be reckoned with!

Members who wish to view one of these training exercises should contact me directly. We cannot accommodate large groups but will do our best to fit you in when it's possible.

CAMERA TRAPS

The next phase of our camera trap network expansion will be taking place in August. We will be purchasing the equipment shortly and will be receiving contributions towards this project from Grietjie, OREC, and the BCAPF fund which is amazing!

40 additional cameras will be installed and managed by ORGR in and around our landscape to further increase the security net around our natural resources. This will ensure real time identification of poachers and rapid response from our team. There is little doubt that we will see an increase in insurgencies given the harsh socio-economic climate on our boundaries.

DEHORNING

Finally just to let you know that the next phase of dehorning will begin within in the next month or two since it has been 18 months after the initial dehorning and horn regrowth is now approaching the minimum 5cm required before dehorning can take place.

It is possible that members sponsoring a dehorning exercise will be able accompany the dehorning team and see them in action. Its an incredible experience. The nature of the process and safety of participants is such that numbers are limited. More details will be made available in due course but in the meantime please contact me if you are interested..



REACHING OUT

John Anderson, Sue Harwood and I joined the SAME (South African Medical Expeditions) Foundation in Sigagule (Mpumalanga/Limpopo border) to see their amazing care centre which feeds hundreds of families on a daily basis and provides clothing, schooling and health assistance at their clinic enthusiastically funded by the Balule Outreach Trust.

After witnessing the incredible system implemented to feed the most vulnerable families in the area, we drove to another village to gift a foreign family who are destitute and have been identified by the Foundation as needing urgent assistance. The little ones are so malnourished, they have Kwashiorkor.

It was heart breaking to meet this family who have no water or beds to sleep on and minuscule amounts of food as a result of no income. They loved the donations which included blankets, beanies, warm clothing and food to last a week or so until they return to receive further assistance.



The stories of child and women abuse (and animals) in the area are hard to listen to and incomprehensible.

We were so happy to be able to make a difference albeit a small one for the time being. We will soon get the sizes of the children so we can collect a good number of essentials for them for summer as well. The SAME Foundation team is so incredibly appreciative of our support over the years-long may it continue!

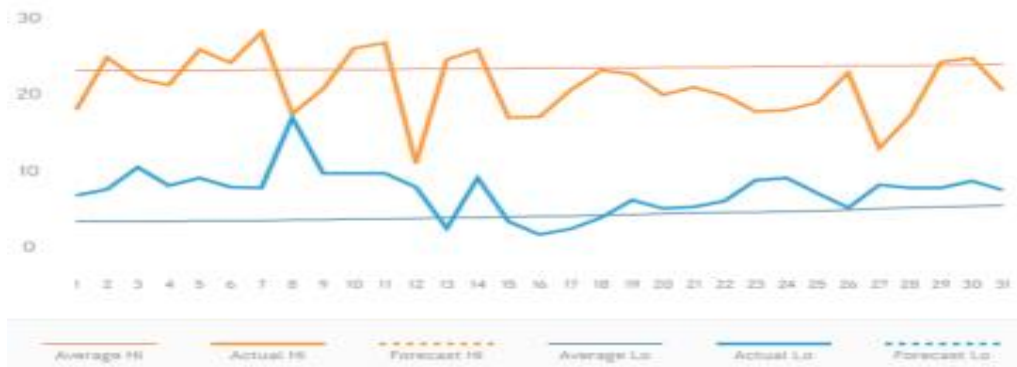
Susan and John also joined Joe Pearson from ONGR visited the Drop-in Centre at the Maseke community to our North to hand over blankets, beanies, baby clothes, cushions, children's shoes and clothes to Sina, the lady in charge. The centre is impressively well built and provides a safe haven where children go after school (during normal times) and receive a meal.

The Balule Outreach Trust is supporting this initiative and supplying funds for weekly food parcels to be distributed to the most vulnerable families in the area. It is run by 10 ladies who tend to the vegetables, clean and cookand are keen to get knitting and crocheting in order to sell as a means of income. Please help by donating wool or needles to get the ladies busy- they were incredibly grateful for everything that is coming their way.

IF YOU WISH TO JOIN THE OLIFANTS OUTREACH WHATSAPP SUPPORT GROUP PLEASE LET SUE KNOW ON 083 228 2546

MEMBERS UPDATE

THE WEATHER REPORT



July was a moderately warm winter month, with average temperature varying between 26°C and 9°C. We did experience some very cold days in July with the coldest morning being 3 degrees Celsius during one of the big cold fronts that swept across the country.

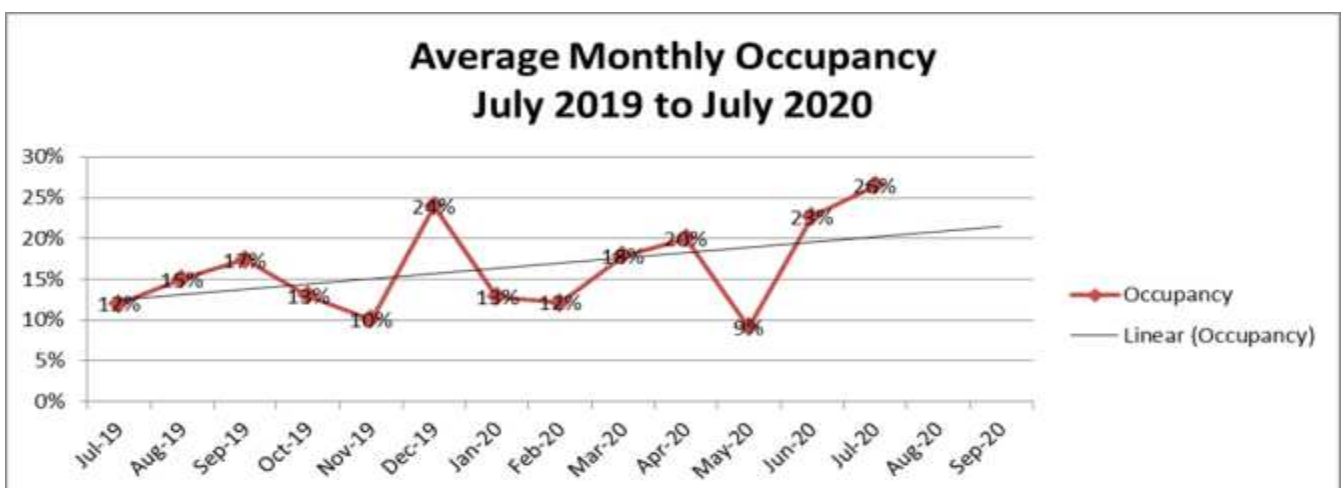
We can expect temperatures to start steadily increasing in August with more days above 30 degrees than in July. Spring is around the corner.

OCCUPANCY

We now have a year's worth of accurate occupancy data to review. From July 2019 to July 2020 our average annual occupancy was 16% and not 10% that we usually work off. There is a clear increase in occupancy for the Covid-19 period, except for May which was a month of initial lockdown departures with no arrivals due to travel restrictions. The linear trend line indicates a steady increase in occupancy during the last year.

August occupancies so far have been record-breaking with the first week seeing a 38% occupancy rate and the second week 42%, giving us a 40% occupancy rate for the month so far.

Month	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Average
Occupancy	12%	15%	17%	13%	10%	24%	13%	12%	18%	20%	9%	23%	26%	16%



TRAVERSING STUDY & VIEWING PROTOCOLS

We have installed a camera trap on the Causeway to measure the actual traversing traffic between North and South and vice versa. The survey will run from the 1st of August until the 31 of August.

It is worth mentioning that despite the remarkably high occupancies in August the traffic densities remained relatively comfortable, with members being patient and courteous even at the occasional busy sighting. Please ensure sightings are properly managed and we do not put pressure on the animals we are viewing. We all want to see the incredible sightings but need to be conscious of the effect on the environment.



WEBSITE UPGRADE

We have done a full revamp our website which has uplifted our online presence. We are all very happy with the outcome and thank Ian Penhale and Sue Harwood for all the assistance and support in getting this project done. Please have a look www.olifantsreserve.co.za



THANK YOU

Units 44, 47, 48 and 74 and their guests have kindly donated R12000 worth of tools to the Olifants workshop. Tools purchased includes a full spanner set, shifting spanners, bobejaan spanners, screwdrivers, hammers, spirit levels, crimpers, and a grease pump just to name a few. The tools will be tightly controlled from the workshop using a shadow board, checklist, and sign out sheet. Thanks very much to those involved in this donation.



INFRASTRUCTURE & FACILITIES

ROADS

The roads are currently in great condition with a few areas needing to be resurfaced. These include Office Crossing, Entry/Exit, and Buff Plains. Resurfacing is quite labour intensive, and we have brought back one casual to assist for two weeks. Our grader driver was off on long leave for most of July so not much grading was done. We have dragged the Railway Line road three times in July, as with the dry conditions and increased traffic, corrugation occurs very quickly. Lisbon has been dragged twice in July and we have repaired ruts in Zones 1,2 and 3. We managed to build the new link road between Entry/Exit and Ian's Pan. It has turned out to be a very nice link and we have received positive comments from members. Once we are done with the resurfacing project we will be installing humps and drains on the new road to prepare for the rainy season.



WATER & ELECTRICAL

The faulty cable on Madrid has been replaced with 1300m of new armoured Cable.

The project took 4 days and was executed quickly and professionally by Hoedspruit electrical supported by our team lead by Errol. This replacement should alleviate all the problems we have experienced on the line in the last couple of months.

We have had a few water line problems in July, mainly due to Elephants pulling up pipes. These events will start to increase as the Elephant population grows along the Riverine area during the next couple of months.



THE LAST WORD

STAFF PROFILE OF THE MONTH



This month we feature one of Unit Guards Louis a friendly face I am sure we are all very familiar with. This gentleman is responsible for checking all the units on the reserve daily with his bicycle. A very important job.

Louis grew up just outside of Phalaborwa in Lelekane, he is the son of Lucas and Annekie whom we all already know very well. He joined the team in 2009 as a temporary labour worker and was then permanently employed in his current role in 2011. Before working for Olifants, Louis worked in construction with Big 5 for 8 years. He has 4 children with his wife Margaret aged between 18 and 1 year old.

In his free time, Louis enjoys maintaining his property at home.

Now I always end with the hope that I will catch you soon on Sunset plains for a Sundowner!

In this edition I am also going to encourage you to have that sundowner with an ORGR Gin in your hand!



Introducing ORGR Baobab Infused Gin Version 2!

Last year's ORGR Gin received excellent feedback and contributed a meaningful sum towards rhino protection! Based on member response we would like to repeat this initiative with the same great product in a new-look bottle.

To get the ball rolling we are requesting that members please place pre-orders on a case lot basis by the end of August. A case of 6 bottles is R2699. Please note these pre-orders will be considered a firm commitment and you will be billed once production is finalized. Delivery will either be on the reserve or via collection in Johannesburg (or CapeTown by special arrangement) in September/October.

To place your order simply respond to the office@olifantsreserve.co.za indicating your Name, Unit number, and number of cases. RSVP ASAP & many thanks in advance for your support!

That's definitely all for now – catch you soon for that sundowner. CHEERS!

Nick and the management team and staff!

