



## ORGR BUSH TELEGRAPH *THE OCTOBER 2020 EDITION*



### Hello Olifants Community!

Summer has arrived together with the rains. We have been blessed with 152 mm so far, which has rapidly transformed the reserve into a vibrant green splash of colour. Three days after the first heavy downpour, the lillies started to push through the soil. Migrant birds have started returning, the Cuckoos have started calling and insect life is starting to buzz. It won't be long now until the impalas start dropping their lambs - and we are all primed to grab the last two months of the year by the horns!

## THE GAME DRIVE

Olifants River Game Reserve produces some world-class game viewing for our members. The last month has been super productive with three lion prides seen on the reserve and leopards around every corner. A standout sighting recently was a leopard on the roof of unit 35 - a particularly unique one that is not often recorded. The pride that frequents Warthog Pan has finally brought out their new cubs to show the

world...little bundles of joy! Birding has been excellent with all the migrants starting to arrive back into the Lowveld. Most of the Cuckoos have returned together with the Yellow-Billed Kites and Wahlberg's Eagle. The race is on to confirm the first Woodlands Kingfisher. Wild Dogs have visited the reserve on a few occasions last month and rhino sightings have been on the increase, which is excellent. Thanks for sharing your photos on the Sightings Group - keep them coming! You are also welcome to send any photos direct to my email address.



# CONSERVATION MATTERS

## General Game Count and Predator Census

The full aerial census is conducted every 2 years, with the last one having taken place in September this year. Prior to that, a full count was conducted in 2018.



### Methodologies for each census

#### 1. Fixed-wing with photography.

Dr Wynand Uys conducted the fixed-wing count from the 14th – 17th of September 2020. A grid formation of 500m (maximum) was flown from South to North. Once a herd or individuals of either elephant, buffalo, or rhino is detected, the aircraft circles the sighting, counts, and photographs the animals from multiple angles. These sightings are logged and plotted by species. The photographs have been analyzed to determine the demographics of the herds.

#### 2. Rotary aerial census

A rotary aerial census was conducted over the entire BNR. The count was conducted using a Robinson R44 piloted by Gerry McDonald. Two spotters and a data logger were in the helicopter. The pilot and data logger also assist with the spotting and counting.



#### 3. Predator Census

A predator census that commenced on the 10th of August 2020 and ended on the 4th of September, was also conducted.

#### 4. Monitoring Inputs

Aerial counting methods have proved to “miss” some of the known herbivore individuals in certain areas. The Wardens and other specialist monitoring programs provided additional verified data on known individuals such as Black Rhino and Sharps Grysbok in their respective regions.

#### 5. Avifaunal survey – Olifants River

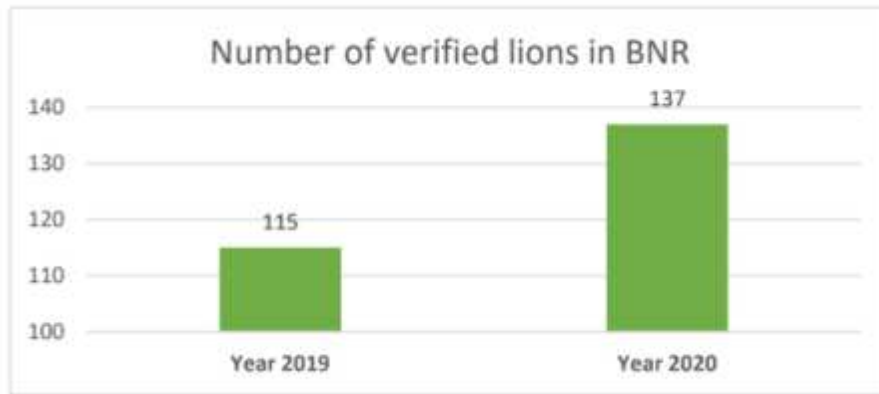
Each year at the beginning of August, an avifaunal survey is conducted on the full length of the Olifants River in Balule. A team walks the entire length of the northern and southern banks. All water birds, hippos, crocodiles, Pel's fishing owls, and vulture nests are recorded. These nests (and any new ones discovered during subsequent surveys) are logged on GPS and checked.

Species	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
African Wild cat			1		4
Baboon Troops	30	26	42	3	23
Buffalo	1043	272	238	410	266
Bushbuck	55	64	25	56	41
Crocodile	71	93	28	61	29
Duiker	80	48	61	53	30
Elephant	581	721	564	721	883
Giraffe	223	321	265	319	249
Ground hornbill		2	2	10	6
Hippo	120	106	116	183	131
Honey badger			2	2	5
Hyena	13	11	22	74	91
Impala	7908	9925	10111	9849	8326
Jackal	2	1	0	0	18
Klipspringer	5	2		16	12
Kudu	705	816	688	873	490
Leopard	6	12	6	55	57
Lion	45	37	36	115	137
Monkey troops	13	8	11	13	12
Nyala	29	53	39	87	28
Ostrich		2			2
Raptor nest	4	1	2		27
Rhino White	47	47	27	32	40
Rhino Black	7	17	16	21	25
Total rhino	54	64	43	53	65
Sable	10	16	2	7	11
Saddle billed stork	3	2			
Sharpe's Grysbuck	17	7	8	48	34
Steenbuck	36	38	36	136	22
Vulture nest	26	45	88	91	11
Warthog	272	319	240	267	124
Waterbuck	378	442	341	384	255
Wild dog		6		28	21
Wildebeest	84	116	107	170	107
Zebra	216	296	279	301	271

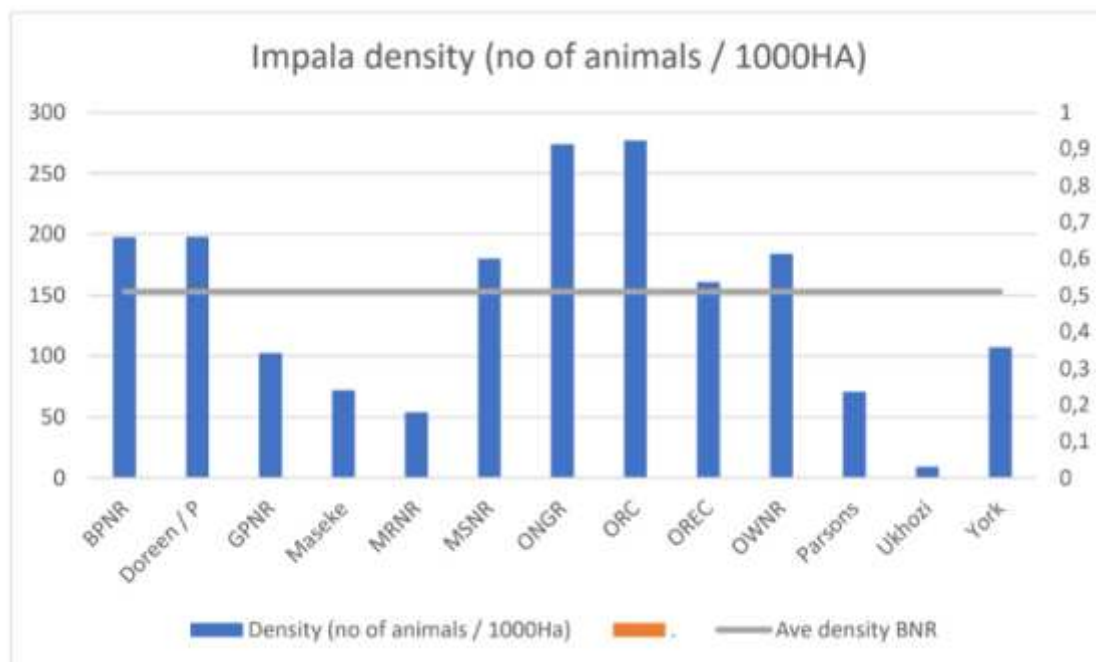
In 2018, biomass for mega-herbivores was 44 440kg / 1000ha. In 2019, this value increased to 58 279kg / 1000ha (an increase of 31%). In the current year, it has risen to 67 041kg / 1000ha. This equates to a further 15% increase in the biomass of mega-herbivores per 1000ha. Despite the overall number of mega-herbivores being less in 2019, the total biomass of same increased by 15% due to the higher elephant numbers.

Species	2018	2019	Biomass 2019	2020	% Change	Biomass 2020
Buffalo	238	410	3847kg / 1000Ha	266	-35%	2496kg / 1000Ha
Black Rhino	16	21	312Kg / 1000Ha	25	19%	371kg / 1000Ha
Elephant	565	721	48 805Kg / 1000Ha	883	22%	59 771kg / 1000Ha
Hippo	118	181	4318Kg / 1000Ha	131	-28%	3125kg / 1000Ha
Rhino	27	32	998Kg / 1000Ha	40	28%	1278kg / 1000Ha
<b>Total</b>	<b>964</b>	<b>1365</b>	<b>58 279Kg / 1000Ha</b>	<b>1346</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>67 041kg / 1000Ha</b>

Lion numbers on BNR have increased quite substantially and this is evident in herbivore (such as wildebeest, kudu and giraffe) numbers decreasing due to predation.



Impala numbers are down from 9849 in 2019 to 8326 on BNR as a whole, but there have been increases in certain regions. ORGR has seen an increase in the last year and we currently have the highest impala density in Balule with 270 individuals per 1000ha. This is due to our multiple watering points on the reserve, making ORGR very attractive to these mixed feeders. Impalas are just as responsible as elephants for deforestation, as elephants push down the large trees and the high impala population decimates any new seedlings. We will need to keep a close eye on this situation.



### Impala mortalities in the Lowveld

We discovered a substantial number of dead impalas on the reserve shortly after the first rains. Bushbuck and nyala carcasses were also discovered in neighbouring properties and into Kruger. Initially, we feared an anthrax outbreak and took the necessary steps by sending samples to the state vet in Skukuza to determine what was behind these sudden deaths. Luckily anthrax was ruled out and pneumonia was identified as the cause. After prolonged first season rainy periods and overcast weather, impalas and other antelope are prone to pneumonia, and given that their condition is not prime after the dry season, they can often succumb to the illness. The vultures had an incredible week in the Lowveld, post these deaths. An interesting natural phenomenon indeed!

## FEATURE ARTICLE: What exactly is CITES and how does it work?

We often hear CITES being mentioned in the news and in reports on conservation and is very relevant in our world due to our wildlife crime problems being experienced in our region. Created as the brainchild of the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) in the '70s, CITES makes environmental news headlines regularly, often with highly polarizing results. There are, however, several misconceptions surrounding this tool of the wildlife conservation industry and, as a result, its guiding principles tend to be lost beneath the layers of opposing conservation perspectives.

### CITES is a treaty, not an organization

CITES stands for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; in other words, it is a multi-national treaty of enormous scope that regulates international trade to avoid the over-exploitation of both animals and plants. As the name suggests, the ultimate intention behind the treaty is to protect endangered species, rather than control the actions of the member state, hence the Appendix listings (see below). At the time of writing, almost every sovereign state in the world is a party to the treaty, meaning that they have ratified the treaty and are, in theory, bound by its provisions. (A conversation around the nuances of international law is beyond the scope of this article).



It falls to the member states to use the treaty provisions and appendixes as guidance for creating their national laws and policies surrounding trade in animals and plants.

For full details, click on this link:

[https://www.cites.org/eng/disc/what.php#:~:text=CITES%20\(the%20Convention%20on%20International,does%20not%20threaten%20their%20survival.](https://www.cites.org/eng/disc/what.php#:~:text=CITES%20(the%20Convention%20on%20International,does%20not%20threaten%20their%20survival.)



## THE SECURITY REPORT

Sadly this month we report the loss of a White Rhino bull on Olifants River Game Reserve. This was the first rhino to be poached on Balule in 2020. Usually, when there is such an incident, by the time the carcass is found the poachers are long gone. This time around, it went down a little differently due to the improved measures and tactics we have been working on for the last two years.

Our AI-enabled camera system picked up the poachers on the evening of Friday the 9<sup>th</sup> of October. The system notified us via SMS within minutes that an incursion had taken place and our APU team was able to put a plan in motion that culminated in an arrest nine hours later. After a patient night waiting in position, at 05h00, the northern-most team close the R40 fence made contact with the gang close and four managed to jump the fence and run. We immediately deployed a helicopter for air support and our partners in the Balule Reaction unit from MRNR were on site to assist the follow-up. Callan, with his K9 Jan, took off in hot pursuit and managed to track and pin one of them down, The poacher was caught red-handed with a rhino horn and was arrested. Unfortunately, the three other suspects managed to escape, but we had captured the main man.

We immediately deployed a team to locate the carcass, using vehicles, foot patrols, fixed-wing aircraft, and a helicopter. Unfortunately, we did not pick up any signs. The following day, rainy weather hampered the search and vultures were not flying. We checked the entire reserve again by helicopter with no luck. It was imperative that we find the carcass, as without it, the poacher would only be charged with possession of a horn - and not poaching!

On Monday morning we found the carcass on Olifants River Game Reserve, not far from Nature's Valley road. The poachers had concealed the carcass with branches, making it impossible to spot from the sky. Hyenas lead us to the grisly find. Three shots from a .458 caliber rifle had taken him down. The projectiles were recovered during the forensic necropsy and contain ballistic evidence which will assist in linking this crime with previous rhinos killed. The case is being investigated by the Endangered Species Unit of the SAPS and we are quite positive about the proceedings as we have a lot of evidence and a poacher in hand. We will keep you updated as the case develops.

The Olifants Anti-poaching team and management have been working hard to get to this point over the last two years and all the time, training, investment, and dedication have enabled us to make this very important arrest. The individual caught was more than likely responsible for 80% of the rhinos poached in Balule over the last 10 years.

Removing him from the system has been a monumental achievement. The collaboration with our neighbours as well as Farmwatch and SAPS is next level and made this whole operation run as smoothly as possible.

On behalf of the team, I would like to thank the members of Olifants River Game Reserve for their contributions and undying support in this cause. It really makes all the difference.

Thank you to Rosemary Clarke for sharing this lovely image of "A2" a couple of days before his death.



## REACHING OUT

### CHRISTMAS IS COMING!

As this extremely challenging year is coming to an end and the festive season is almost upon us, it's time to reach out and bring some joy to those who have struggled more than any of us could possibly imagine!



With this in mind, we would like to express our enormous thanks to all generous Olifants members who are sponsoring 100 underprivileged children with a Santa Shoebox and sweets! Janine Scorer is currently organising a special, fun day for them, and within a few days of sending a "call out" for members to donate a festively wrapped, re-usable shoe box packed with toiletries, clothing and a gift, all wishes were fulfilled!

The children (aged between 7 and 16 years of age) will receive their boxes from "Father Christmas" at the SAME Christmas party on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> December at the Childrens' Community Centre in Sigagule. Selected from the rural villages of Sigagule, Keyalani, Masingitana, and Gazita, these children have been identified by Shirley-Anne Beretta of the South African Medical Expeditions (SAME) organization, and her team as being in desperate need for upliftment. They have very little in their lives and are being raised in their respective villages either by their grannies, old aunties, kind neighbours or siblings.

We thank ALL those who have supported this joyful initiative in the past, as well as the current drive to bring love and light to those less privileged than us! Thanks too, to each and every family who has kindly donated clothing, food and essential items throughout the hard lockdown period – your generosity is making a difference and changing lives in the neighbouring communities.

Please remember, if you would like to join The Olifants Outreach WhatsApp group to keep abreast with charity drives and donation suggestions, etc, contact Susan Harwood on 083 228 2546.

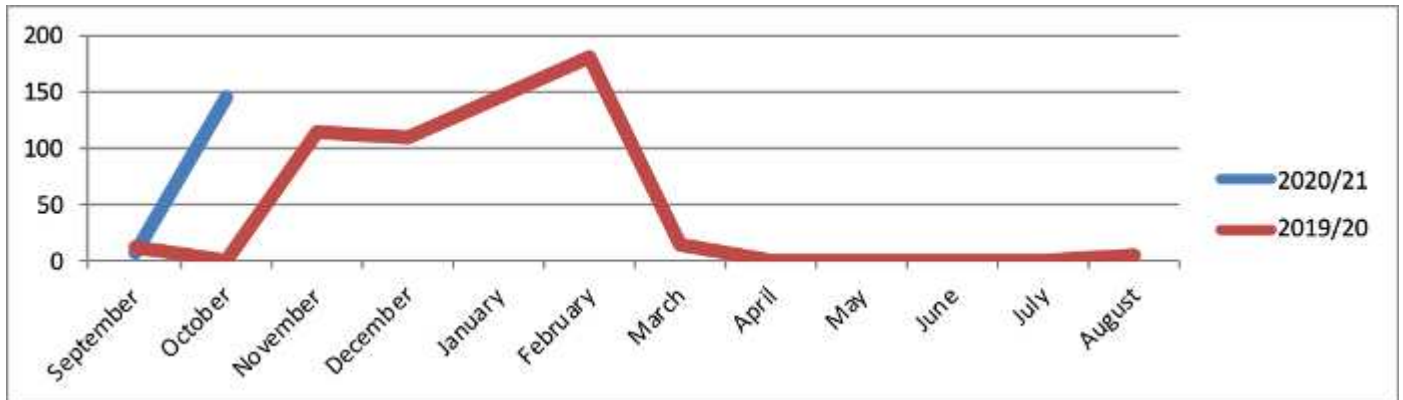


# MEMBERS UPDATE

## THE WEATHER REPORT

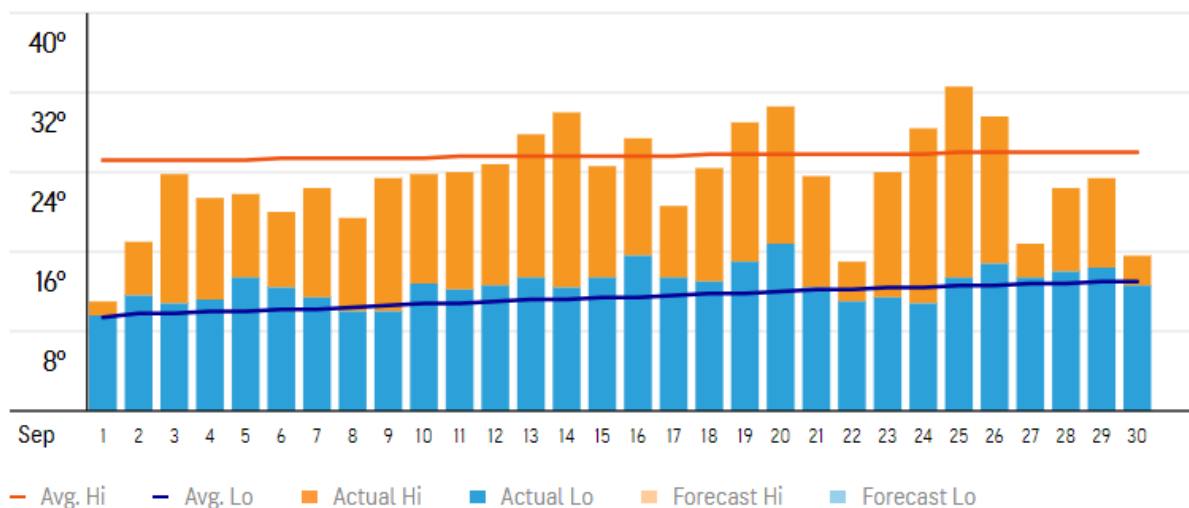
We have had an excellent start to the rainy season with 152mm of liquid gold falling since the beginning of September. The average rainfall for this time of the year over the last 30 years has been around 35mm, so we are significantly ahead. All the indicators are pointing towards good rains this season and the bush has already responded by bursting into a vibrant flush of green.

*Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season*



September's temperatures have been very moderate to warm, and we have not had many days above 30 degrees yet which has been excellent to retain the moisture in the soil following the good rains. We are expecting a heatwave towards the second half of October with the mercury expected to tickle the 40-degree mark.

*September Temperatures*



## OUR NIGHT SKIES FORECAST - October In a nutshell

### Moon

Date	Time	Phase
01/10	23h05	Full Moon
10/10	02h39	Last Quarter
16/10	21h31	New Moon
23/10	15h23	First Quarter
31/10	16h49	Full Moon (Blue Moon)



### Moon - Earth Relations

Perigee: 356 900 km on the 17/10 at 08h46

Apogee: 406 300 km on the 03/10 at 19h22 / 406 400 km on the 30/10 at 20h46

### Planet Visibility:

Jupiter and Saturn in Sagittarius visible in the evening sky

Mars near Pisces visible in the evening and later at dawn

Venus near Leo at dawn

Mercury near Virgo visible in the evening in the West

### Some easy-to-identify bright stars:

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

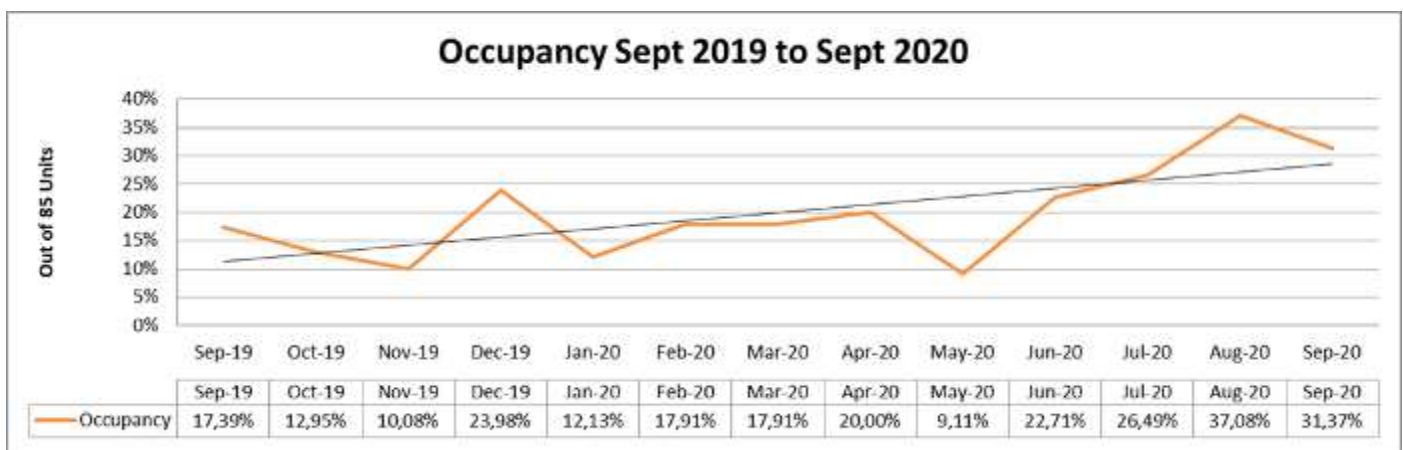
Regulus: blue-white star and the brightest star in Leo

The Pointers: Alpha and Beta Centauri



### OCCUPANCY

September ended off with a 31,37% occupancy, so another hectic month. The busiest day saw 51% in residence and the quietest, a 24% occupancy. October is looking much the same as September and we are expecting a very busy year end!



## HOUSEKEEPING SERVICES

We are experiencing pressure with the very high and continuous occupancies on the reserve - and are currently looking at ways to accommodate every request, to the best of our ability. Therefore there might be some changes to the protocols to achieve this and unfortunately, we cannot hire more maids at this stage, as we have limited staff accommodation.



### Walks on the Wild Side

The walks on Olifants have been an incredible addition to our member's activities. Our team has conducted 19 walks since the beginning of September and have had some awesome encounters on foot. It has been exciting to experience our beautiful reserve from a different perspective. We will continue these foot safaris until the vegetation makes it unsafe to do so. However, we will be taking a short break from the walks to give the guides some time to take leave - and will release dates soonest.



### Fundraising Update

We are most grateful for all the support received from members over time for our anti-poaching programming and also for our community outreach drive. We are proud of the work that has been done in both community projects and in running one of the best anti-poaching units in the country.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank those members who have donated to both the APU fund and the Community Outreach fund. We truly have very generous members and these funds will make a huge difference to the lives of our surrounding communities as well as the wildlife and fauna we are protecting. A special thanks to Hayley from Unit 23 who personally donated her cash savings to the fight against rhino poaching! You are a champion in our eyes!



## Waste Management

We encourage all members to please separate their waste into two different bin bags, namely a green one for any organic material such as foodwaste - and a black one for non-organic materials such as all plastics, tin, glass, etc. If you are unsure about this process, please contact the office for clarity.

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	

## Heritage Day

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of September, South Africa celebrated Heritage Day, one of our favourite Public Holidays. It's a day we are all encouraged to revive our cultural heritages and share them with others. It was a fantastic excuse for the Olifants ladies to wear some colourful clothing to work to brighten up our day!



A brief History of this special day:  
In KwaZulu-Natal, 24 September was known as Shaka Day, in commemoration of Shaka, the Zulu king, on the presumed date of his death in 1828. Shaka played an important role in uniting the disparate Zulu clans into a cohesive nation and each year on this day, people gather at the Shaka Memorial to honour him.

# THE LAST WORD

## Staff Profile

This month we feature Lucky Inama, one of our dedicated APU Field Rangers. Lucky grew up in Tembisa, Gauteng. When he finished school, Lucky became an apprentice to a boilermaker which he worked at for a few years. When retrenched from this employment, Lucky used the money he received to enroll for anti-poaching training in Hoedspruit. He has always had a passion for conserving wildlife and decided to follow his dreams. Once his training was complete he was posted in the Selati Game Reserve for a while before joining Gritjie Nature Reserve as a Field Ranger. Earlier this year we had a vacancy on the ORGR team and Lucky came highly recommended from Balule Management. He has become an integral part of the team and is an excellent communicator, is energetic, and always goes the extra mile. We are fortunate to have him on our team. Lucky is father to a 3-year-old daughter who stays with his ex-partner in Tembisa. He gets to see her every time he goes home on leave.



That's all from us for this month! We hope to see you all on the reserve very soon! Stay safe and all the best. Catch you on Sunset Plains for a Sundowner...

Best Regards

**Nick and the management team and staff**

