



ORGR BUSH TELEGRAPH *THE NOVEMBER 2020 EDITION*



Hello Olifants Community!

We find ourselves in the final month of the craziest year in recent history. Before we know it we will be welcoming 2021 in the hopes that it will be less apocalyptic than its predecessor. The reserve has had an incredible early transformation with the good rains in October and the bush is buzzing with all the insect and birdlife that summer brings. The festive season is on our doorstep and we hope to be able to see you on the reserve for this special time of the year.

THE GAME DRIVE

November heralded the arrival of the impala lambs, with the first sightings of the newcomers around the middle of the month... and the birthing continues. By mid-December, there will be a plethora of these little ones scattered across the reserve, bounding through the bush with youthful energy. Predator viewing remains world-class on Olifants with lions, leopards and hyenas frequently spotted.

The cheetah made an appearance during November which provided for some incredible viewing over a few days. Elephant numbers have dwindled in our region since the rains arrived. These beautiful pachyderms have moved into the Mopani woodlands to eat the fresh leaves, offering some respite for our immediate environment, for a while at least. The Woodlands Kingfishers have descended upon the bush, from their winter residence in central Africa and have made their presence known with the loud, characteristic call - a high-pitched "tuuui", followed by a pause and a trilling, down-slurred "trrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr".



Rhino News

Balule Dehorning follow up operation

Over the last 4 weeks, Balule Nature Reserve has conducted the follow-up dehorning project after the initial dehorning that took place 18 months ago. We see the improved security measures and dehorning as a major success in the area resulting in a vast decrease in poaching incidents.

Over 20 White and three Black Rhinos have been dehorned over the four weeks. There are still a few individuals that need to be done and these will be dealt with once the new permit is used by LEDET.



Balu & Stompi return to Balule Nature Reserve

Welcome home Boys! Balule has released two White Rhinos back onto the reserve. These individuals were orphaned on Balule due to poaching and were being rehabilitated at the Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre. They spent the first two weeks at the Rhino Bomas at Olifants North to familiarise themselves with the environment before being released into the open system. They have been moving around quite a bit, looking to establish themselves and have been frequenting the Warthog Pan area. Keep an eye out for them - they have tracking bracelets on their ankles. Please report any sightings to the White Rhino reporting line on 082 523 3884 (WhatsApp). These precious new residents are being closely monitored by the White Rhino research team. You can watch a short video about this story by clicking [here](#).



CREATURE FEATURE: Chacma Baboons (*Papio ursinus*)

As we well know, baboons on our reserve have wreaked havoc in some houses and this is largely due to sympathetic members feeling sorry for these hungry primates which battle for food during the winter months. It is up to us all to refrain from this practice in the interests of peace and safety so we can continue to live harmoniously with them.

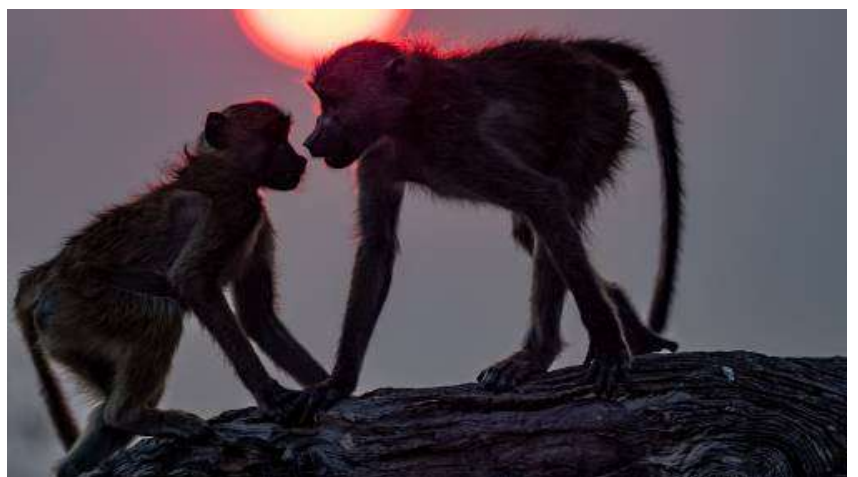


Chacma baboons are one of the largest monkeys in the world, second only to the mandrill by mass, though baboons are longer and taller on average. Their scientific name – *Papio ursinus* – is a reference to their bear-like features (and swagger). In adult males, powerful canines can grow to a length close to 4cm – similar in size to those of a leopard, and are used in battles for dominance and defence of the troop.

Wild baboons are instinctively wary of humans but are quick to learn new tricks and pass this on to the next generation. When they learn to associate humans with free food, they can cause enormous damage and pose a potential threat to human safety, as well as their own. This is true of most monkey species but is particularly relevant to baboons due to their large size and strength – determined individuals have been known to lift glass sliding doors off their rails to gain entrance to a kitchen. It can be deeply distressing to return from a successful game drive to discover your belongings strewn through the bushveld, a chewed tube of toothpaste and a pungent calling card in the bathroom sink for good measure.

These inconveniences can turn dangerous when humans ignore the rules and encourage this behaviour by failing to secure food or, worse, blatantly ignoring rules by feeding baboons. Those who do so tend to gravitate towards feeding the females and cute infants, rather than the males, which offends the very core of the baboon social hierarchy and can send the dominant male into fits of testosterone-driven rage. Due to their male-dominant hierarchy, baboons are quick to distinguish between human men and women, showing more fear of the former and generally targeting the latter.

These primates are omnivorous, and though the bulk of their diet consists of plant material, they do eat meat and have even been known to hunt small antelope. Their diet can be extremely varied and includes fruits, seeds, grass, blossoms, bulbs, insects, worms, rodents, birds (and eggs) and fungi.



THE SECURITY REPORT

We are delighted to announce that we have had no security concerns on the reserve since the loss of the White Rhino at the beginning of October. We have had the opportunity to install our additional 40 artificial intelligence-enabled cameras along key strategic locations to increase our chances of detecting and responding to an entry by poachers.

GKEPF has recently arranged for some very important legal training to be conducted for Field Rangers and Reserve Managers in a two-session course presented by Coert Jordaan. Coert is the leading legal expert in the Anti-poaching industry and has dealt with over 800 shooting incidents in the Kruger involving poachers and field rangers. The training was incredible and the information that was handed over will help our field rangers should they get themselves into a situation where they will need to use their weapons to defend themselves legally. The legal implication of shooting a poacher was discussed together with the 'dos' & don'ts' when being confronted on duty in the bush. The training included crime scene management, police statements, and supervisory roles in an incident.

Our APU team remains highly motivated in protecting the reserve and we remain as one of the most elite units in the Lowveld. We are an adaptable force with excellent thermal and K9 abilities at our disposal.



REACHING OUT

Many thanks to the members who are contributing to our current Shoe Drive. The SAME Foundation has expressed a need for shoes for the children in Sigagule. Thanks to the food parcels from the Balule Trust, the foundation has been able to increase its reach and in the process, identify many destitute families with children in need of footwear.



So far, in Johannesburg, we have collected 28 pairs of Bata school shoes (unisex lace-ups) from the nationwide special at SPAR stores, wherein "Spending R500 entitles you to purchase a pair of Bata school shoes for R40". If you would like to collect these shoes and donate them, you can either drop them off with Susan Harwood in Dainfern before Christmas or take them to the office in Olifants. In January, these will be collected by the SAME Foundation for distribution.

We have also collected 50 pairs of new slip slops for children of all ages and we will donate these to Maseke as 100 children in Sigagule will already be receiving slip-slops in their Santa Shoeboxes organised by Janine Scorer.

One of our generous members, Gen Thomas, has made and despatched over a hundred fabulous sacks and pencil cases for the children in Maseke and Sigagule. Such a lovely gifting idea for Christmas! Thank you Gen!



Trust Bursary students at Southern Cross School

The school reports that our two bursary students, Kgaphy Mathole and Leonie Wiltshire, coped well with the Covid enforced, largely remote learning, matric year and have written their I.E.B. matriculation examinations. We look forward to receiving their results and wish them well in their future careers

New classroom at the SAME After School Child Care Centre in Sigagule Village

In February we financed the building of a much-needed new classroom at the SAME After School Child Care Centre in Sigagule Village. Unfortunately, due to the Covid lockdown, building was postponed until October and we can now confirm that the new classroom is almost complete and will be ready for use when the Centre re-opens in January.



Funding of Food Parcels

SAME, Maseke and the Apostolic Faith Mission in Phalaborwa.

Due to large scale Covid enforced unemployment, particularly in the tourism industry, we commenced funding of food parcels to affected families through the SAME Centre in Siagule Village in April. This was followed in May by providing funds to the Maseke Drop-in-Centre and the Apostolic Church.

Since then we have continuously provided funds to feed between 160 and 200 families a month providing essential nutritious food for between 800 and 1000 people daily.

Together with the monthly food parcel deliveries the families are often given items of clothing, blankets, food, shoes, bedding and stationery, many of which have been donated by Bags of Love in Johannesburg.



Since starting the ORGR Outreach WhatsApp group, we have garnered a “membership” of 27 people and look forward to more members joining in! This group has already proved to be a handy conduit for creating awareness of projects to assist the communities around us and for like-minded members to share in the transportation of donations to and from the reserve. – Susan Harwood 083 228 2546

MEMBERS UPDATE

ORGR BOARD

Ian Penhale has sadly decided to step down as Chairman of the Board as he and his family will be emigrating to Ireland in the near future. Ian has played an important role in Olifants over the last few years and has selflessly given a lot of time and energy into our incredible reserve. Vince Ryan has taken over as Chairman and is perfectly well suited to take on this role. Vince, who has been a member at Olifants for almost seventeen years, has been on the Olifants Board for the last 11 years and has intimate knowledge of the 'ins and outs' of this phenomenal place. We are very privileged to have some amazing people on the Olifants Board. Below is a breakdown of each board member's portfolio.

Vince Ryan – Chairman

Alistair Hewitt – Conservation, Fundraising & Security

Sean Joebert – Finance

Louise Clearly – Legal and Company Secretarial

Glen Forsdyk – Infrastructure and Insurance

Susan Harwood – Outreach & Community Development

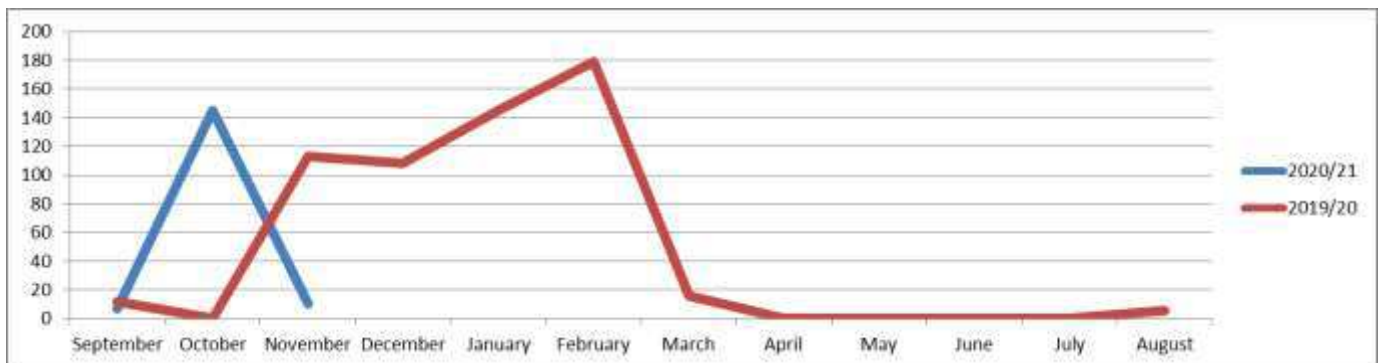
Arnold Chatz – Infrastructure and Vehicles



THE WEATHER REPORT

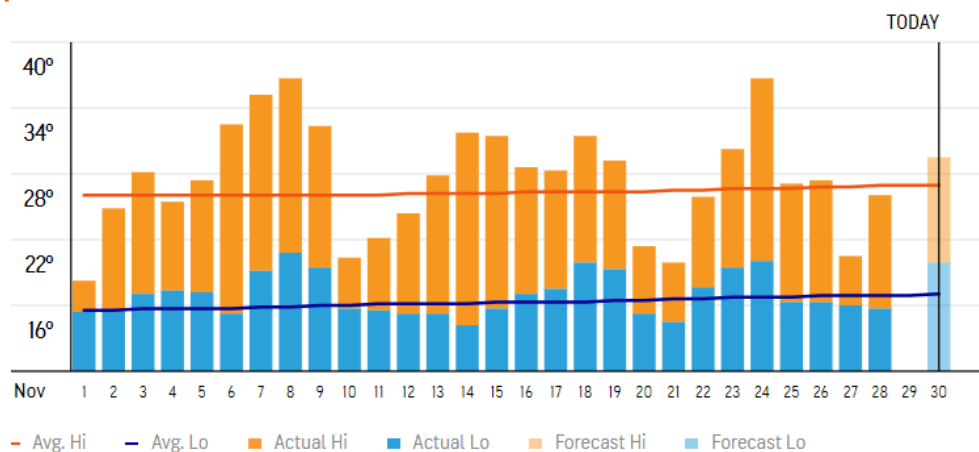
We were expecting more rain to fall in November but we only received a total of 11mm. The long term forecast still indicates we will be experiencing an above-average rainy season and we remain hopeful that it will be a wet summer.

Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season



There have been a few cooler overcast days with light drizzle this month but for the most part, the temperatures rose well above 30 degrees and a couple of days the mercury was tickling the 40-degree mark with high humidity.

November Temperatures



OUR NIGHT SKIES - November In a nutshell

Moon

Date	Time	Phase
08/11	15h46	Last Quarter
15/11	07h07	New Moon
22/11	06h45	First Quarter
30/11	11h30	Full Moon

Moon - Earth Relations

Perigee: 357 800 km on the 14/11 at 13h48
 Apogee: 405 900 km on the 27/11 at 02h29

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 Virgo, and near Libra by the very end of the month; visible at dawn
 Mercury very low in the east near Libra



Some easy-to-identify bright stars

Antares: red super-giant in Scorpius

Arcturus: red giant in Boötes

Spica: brightest bluish-white star in Virgo

Canopus: yellowish-white star in Carina

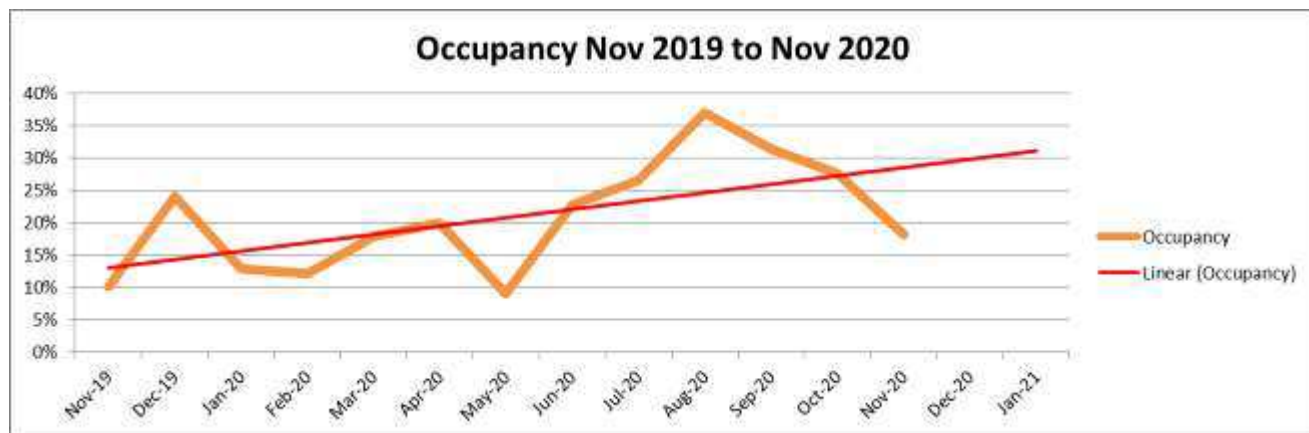
Altair: a white star, brightest in Aquila

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

The Pointers: Alpha and Beta Centauri

OCCUPANCY

November ended off with an 18% occupancy and an average of 17 units in residence compared to 10% occupancy last year. Our busiest day saw 22 units in residence and the quietest day had eight in residence. Over the last year, our annual occupancy has increased from 10% to 21%, indicating how important the bush is to us all during this challenging year we have had.



Increased reserve usage reminders

With the steady increase over the past year mentioned above and the festive season fast approaching, we thought it fitting to remind the Olifants community of the following points:

Radio Usage

The radio system has two main functions on the reserve. Firstly it is to be used to call in sightings, control sighting traffic and to update viewing status to others on the reserve. Secondly, radios are to be used as a communication tool between the Office and members and for any emergencies or urgent matters that may crop up. It is important to please keep radio communication to a minimum with short concise messages and we encourage members to use their mobile devices to plan social arrangements and personal conversations instead of using the radio. Please call the office during the stipulated hours except in the case of an emergency where management is available 24hours a day. It is also important to note that children must not use the radio to call in sightings and only adults should make use of the system.

Sightings Protocol

Although we do not have a vehicle limit on our sightings, it is vitally important for the individual who is “in charge” of the sighting to control vehicle numbers based on the available space and to avoid unnecessary pressure on the animals. When the reserve is busy, members must please ensure they allow other members to join in – and not “hog” the scene of interest for extended periods. This relates specifically to a sighting of a sensitive nature and/or a tight area that cannot accommodate many vehicles. We suggest a 10min duration at any sighting which will ensure the animal does not get stressed by vehicle overcrowding – and all will get a chance to experience the action!

Walks on the Wild Side

The walks around the reserve have been a great success and enjoyed by many members. Unfortunately, we are unable to offer walking in December but will advise the members via email mailshot when the walking experience will be available again.



ORGR Gin

Our new batch of delicious custom made (very popular) ORGR Baobab-infused Gin is available in the shop. We have already sold 472 bottles with pre-order sales leaving only 242 bottles! Stocks are limited so ensure you get your bottle today. You can purchase your case of six bottles for R2699 or R499 per bottle. Contact the office for any orders...before we run out!



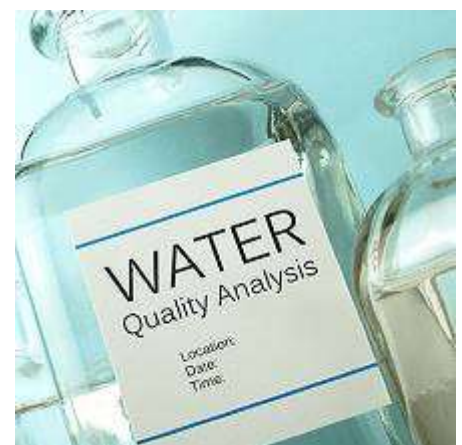
Rubble Removal

We have removed vast amounts of rubble and old materials from the back of the staff compounds, and workshops. There is still a substantial amount of rubble to be removed, but we are getting there bit by bit.



Water Quality Tests

As part of our Conservation Management plan, we have tested all the boreholes to check the quality of the water we are receiving. We found that all the water extracted from the boreholes is quite 'hard'. Should members want to install a softener, we have the exact chemical breakdown of each water source to assist in the customization of the softeners at the units. Most of the water sources contained some amounts of Ecoli bacteria which we are now dealing with by adding chlorination tabs to the holding tanks. This process will kill off bacteria and is done carefully to ensure the water is not tainted with the smell and taste of chlorine. This test will be done once a year going forward.



Staff Profile

This month we feature Nkosinathi Nguenha who is part of our maintenance team and an incredible asset to the reserve.

He assists in all aspects of maintenance including reliving Ronald at the workshop, driving tractors, road maintenance and town shopping trips. He joined Olifants for the first time as a casual in 2016 and was permanently employed in March 2019. His brother Mateo and Aunt Alucia both work at Olifants. He is an incredibly dedicated and hardworking person and dreams of becoming an accountant. Nkosinathi has a certificate in Business Management and has finished his first year in completing a diploma in Accounting Science through distance learning. Nkosinathi was born in Summerset village and has no children of his own. He enjoys reading, playing soccer and loves listening to music.



FINAL WORD

That's all from us for this month! Wishing you all a happy festive season and we hope you will be able to spend time with family and loved ones. Looking forward to seeing 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

