



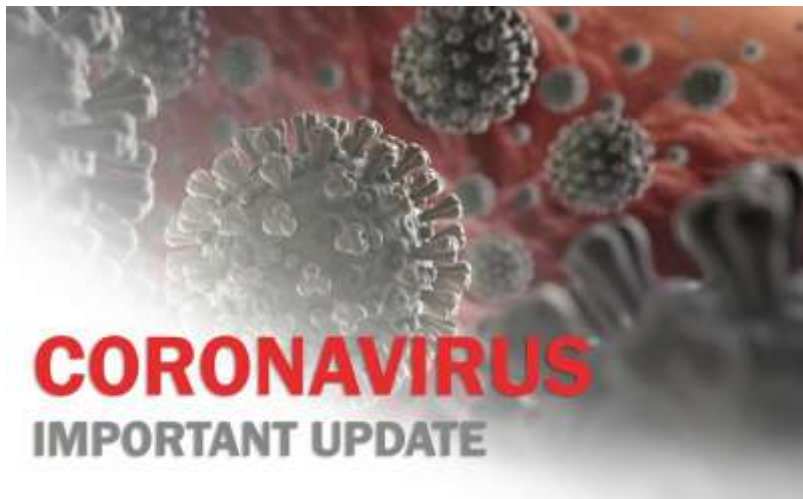
ORGR BUSH TELEGRAPH

THE December 2020 EDITION



Hello Olifants Community!

We hope you all had a fantastic festive season filled with family, and friends. The reserve has been a buzz of activity with quite a few members deciding to spend their time on Olifants over this special time. It's a very rewarding season to be in the bush with all the life that mid-summer brings. The veld is in superb condition, bursting with greenery and an abundance of beautiful flora and fauna. It is also a time to reflect back on the year we have had and to ponder on the possibilities of 2021.



Most of the world is currently dealing with the challenges of the second wave of Covid-19 infections and South Africa and our little corner of Limpopo are no exception. South Africa hit just under 18 000 new daily infections towards the end of December and cases in Hoedspruit are soaring with the highest number reported recently, since the onset of the pandemic. There have been a few cases of infections amongst our members who have been self-isolating on the property until they are

no longer a transmission risk. We suspect we will still see more positive cases locally in the coming weeks. We all need to be hyper-cautious while spending time here, to ensure we do not spread or contract the virulent virus. There is a false sense of safety being on a game reserve but with the number of people travelling into the area from Corona hotspots across the country and the world, we cannot let down our guard. We ask all of our members and their guests to please follow the protocols set out below in the interest of everyone's health.

1. Masks must be worn in all public areas.

Please ensure you wear a mask in all public areas and when interacting with other members, users, guests and staff. Further to this, a mask must be worn when the housekeeping staff is in your unit whilst you are in residence, as well as when you are interacting with office, workshop and/or management staff. Ideally, social distancing of two meters should be adhered to at all times.

2. Office Access to Members

it is vital that the following protocols are adhered to: The occupants of only one vehicle may enter the office precinct at any time, and only two people may enter the administration offices and/or shop simultaneously. The rest of the vehicle occupants should remain outside or preferably in the vehicle. Visits to the office should be as expedient as possible, in order to give other members and users the opportunity to shop and attend to administrative matters such as settling accounts, etc. Use of the office and boardroom facilities to connect to the internet will not be allowed until further notice.

3. No Social Gatherings allowed on the reserve

There must be no social gatherings of multiple units on the reserve between now and Tuesday 12 January 2021. We will keep members up to date should restrictions need to be extended beyond this date.

4. Clubhouse and pool closed, for general use - but open for pre-bookings

The main risk at the clubhouse and pool is contact with multiple persons and the risk of spreading the virus from that communal ground. We have implemented a booking system of 9 x 1-hour slots per day between 09:00 and 18:00. **Members can book a slot to enjoy the pool as long as the protocols are followed.** Please note that slots may not be booked by the same unit every day as "hogging" the area would rob others of the chance to enjoy the pool. Please note that this system needs to be self-managed by members as we do not have the capacity to man the clubhouse, control the flow of people, and sanitize the area after each slot. However, we will monitor the efficacy of this system and will adapt it if needs be. and advise you when these protocols and restrictions are to be lifted and/or revised as directed by Government and the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.

THE GAME DRIVE

Despite the thick vegetation associated with this time of year, sightings have been excellent on the reserve, with an abundance of babies of all species. The highlight for the month was a sighting of a Caracal on Buffalo Plains towards the end of the year. These elusive creatures are seldom seen, so it was very special to have one recorded again.



Leopards have been plentiful, with sightings reported almost daily. The two lion prides that frequent ORGR have been seen fairly regularly, with one located along the riverine and the other East of the railway between Hide Dam, Warthog Pan and Sable Dam. Elephant numbers have increased a little since November but they are not present in any great numbers. The wild dogs have been sighted on a few occasions, with the pack now reduced to three individuals. Buffalo have been sighted occasionally on the reserve with only a few Dagga boys remaining permanently in residence along the Palm Loop. This time of the year brings out a plethora of different insects, some of which are vibrantly beautiful and all fascinating to study.



FEATURE ARTICLE: Stories in the Sky

This month, instead of the normal astronomy updated, we thought we would share this interesting article by Ben Coley on how some of our more prominent celestial objects are perceived by different cultures.

Since the dawn of mankind, the human race has recorded its stories, myths and legends in the tapestry of their starlit night sky. Regardless of geographical location and culture, the celestial realm has long been the ultimate storyboard upon which humanity has logged its thoughts, beliefs and experiences. Not only were their observations not purely aesthetic in nature, but also it did not take the early settlers long to begin to understand the world by watching the passage of the stars night after night.



These early observations paved the way to modern society and it is fascinating to realise just how much of today's world is linked to our ancestors' observations of the darkness. Let us now delve back into history and investigate some of these stories.

The Milky Way

The ethereal, spiral arms of our galaxy can be seen arcing across the sky, particularly during the winter months when it passes almost directly overhead. Even from suburban areas, the glow of countless stars is evident, but imagine what the sky must have looked like before the advent of electricity and industry and the pollution they now cause!

The early Bushman told that this celestial beacon was created when a young girl threw the ashes of her campfire high into the sky to guide her father home from his hunting trip. To some tribes, the diffuse white streak of the Milky Way represented the bellies of a vast herd of celestial springbok, while to others it traced a prodigious footpath upon which the spirits of our ancestors still tread. In Zulu culture, the opalescent band was created by the hooves of the gods' great herd of cattle as they marched to and from their feeding grounds, slowly wearing through the boundary between the perpetually lit celestial realm and the Earth below.

The Moon

According to the Bushmen, the Moon is the sandal of a trickster god named Kaggen that had been frozen in a local waterhole before being tossed into the sky to light up the night. However, the Sun was extremely unhappy about sharing the sky with another luminous object and, to this day, chases it through the night, cutting strips from the Moon until it is almost extinguished. At the last moment, the Moon begs for forgiveness and Sun relents its attack, allowing the Moon to recover until it becomes full again. At this point, the Sun recommences its onslaught once more. Due to the repetitive phases of the Moon and its seemingly regular regeneration, much African folklore found it synonymous with reincarnation and recovery. This belief was honoured by the Bushmen during their hunting trips, trusting that if one looked at the Moon after shooting their quarry with a poison arrow, it would allow the prey to recover and escape.

As it takes approximately 29 days for the Moon to go through a full cycle and return to the same phase, these phases have also been used for millennia to mark the passage of time. The 'Ishango Bone', found in the former Belgian Congo, is a baboon fibula decorated with various etchings that indicate its use as an ancient lunar calendar. Scientists estimate that it is over 35,000 years old!

The Southern Cross

The Southern Cross, or Crux, is the smallest of the recognised 88 constellations but is probably the most famous in the southern sky. Not only does it point towards the south, an invaluable navigation tool, but there are also many recognised animal associations.

The most common interpretation in southern Africa is that the four brightest stars of Crux are a herd, or 'journey', of female giraffe and the two Pointer Stars (Alpha and Beta Centauri) represent a pair of giraffe bulls in hot pursuit. Another version of the story sees the cross as symbolising the head of a giant giraffe (due to the diamond shape), with the Pointers as its neck. Some Bushmen tribes believed that the stars of the cross are a pride of lionesses, along with their young cub (Epsilon Crucis) and the Pointers embodying their two pride males following close behind as they prowl towards the horizon.



Orion

Orion as a constellation does not have any specific African mythology associated with it, but aspects of the constellation are well documented. Many cultures have seen the famous Belt of Orion as various animals, including both tortoises and warthogs. One legend identifies them as three zebras. Mintaka, the first belt-star to rise was seen as the stallion, with Alnilam and Alnitak, his two mares following behind.

One version of Bushman starlore tells the story of the great god of East who set out hunting and climbed up to the Large Magellanic Cloud where he aimed his bow at the three zebras of Orion's belt. According to beliefs at the time, zebras were restricted to the heavens and were not found on Earth. However, the god missed, his arrow falling short (symbolised by Orion's 'sword' and the Great Orion Nebula). The arrow could not be retrieved due to the presence of a great lion represented by the giant red star, Betelgeuse. To honour the zebras' escape, the god of the East sent them to Earth to live out their lives in peace.

The Magellanic Clouds

When looking directly South on a clear night, two imperfections stand out against the clarity of the darkness. The Large and Small Magellanic Clouds are sister galaxies of the Milky Way, locked in a gravitational war with us, and each other. They are named after the great Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan who documented the ever-present clouds during his circumnavigation of the globe in the early 1500s. However, these two smudges in the sky have been known since ancient times, and early settlers considered them to be indicators of summer and wet weather when visible at night. The Large Magellanic Cloud was often portrayed as the shield of 'Naka', the Horn Star (Canopus, the second brightest star in the sky), as it slowly emerged from the eastern horizon, dragging in the start of the new year.

The bushmen saw the clouds as a pair of celestial steenboks, perhaps due to their diffuse nature rendering them hard to see under less than perfect conditions, in the same way that the diminutive steenbok prefers to remain hidden. Others saw the testicles of a great lion! As strange as this may sound, one must remember that the bushmen had massive respect for the apex predator with whom they shared the land, and there are multiples of accounts of celestial lions in their history.

THE SECURITY REPORT

We have ended 2020 with one rhino lost on Balule as a whole and one arrest for the same incident. This is the best result Balule has had since 2011. This incredible achievement has been possible due to the superb work and effort that has gone into anti-poaching by our dedicated team, the dehorning project in the area, and the undying support we have received from the members of the Olifants Family.

December was, however, a difficult month for neighbouring areas with multiple rhinos lost in Klaserie, Selati, and in the KNP. Balule had an incursion onto the reserve during the month but no evidence of carcasses found. The syndicates are running their poaching operations at full tilt again and we cannot let the success of 2020 allow us to slip into a complacent mode. We do not foresee the poaching problem getting any better for 2021 so we continue to put maximum effort into protecting our wildlife and will also continue to adapt and develop our protocols and capabilities to keep up with the fight.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to use footprints to detect incursions, as the poachers are wearing multiple layers of thick socks and foam on their feet to conceal tracks. Our main line of early detection is our Camera network of 50 AI-enabled cameras spread across the reserve to capture any incursion allowing us to act expediently. Proactive patrolling on foot, by vehicle and by air is also a vital deterrent ensuring the criminals know we are in the field 24 hours a day.

CONSERVATION

Wild Dog Euthanasia

On the 30th of December, we had the extremely difficult task of euthanizing a male Wild Dog on the reserve. We received a call early in the morning reporting a Wild Dog in distress at Sand Dam. We responded and found the animal virtually paralysed and in considerable pain.

There were no visible physical wounds and we contacted the vets immediately to assist us with this matter. They assessed the animal and it was too far gone to save its life, so the decision was made to put it out of its misery. A post mortem was conducted and tissue samples were sent through to the labs to determine the cause of the canine's severe condition. At the time of writing this newsletter, the test results have not yet been received, but will be shared with you all in next month's communication.



Rhino News

Rhino sightings have been down on the reserve due to the availability of water in the environment but there is still substantial activity on ORGR especially at night. The two recently released orphaned rhinos are doing well and are currently in the Ukhozi area. They are regularly monitored to ensure their reintroduction is a success. The great news is that the large White Rhino bull known as B11 has now taken over the territory around Wild Dog Pan, replacing the bull which was poached in October. Please remember to send all your rhino sightings to Zala on the Rhino Monitoring WhatsApp Hotline +27 82 523 3884.

REACHING OUT



Last year ended on a very happy note, thanks to the generosity of many members and management team. A very big thank you to the Pitheys for treating the staff's children at ORGR with toys for Christmas! They were all so delighted, as you can see from the picture.

Thank you too to everyone who jumped in to contribute Bata school shoes for the children of Sigagule. We collected 55 pairs in all and 50 pairs of brand new slip slops which are to be divided between the Sigagule and Maseke centers.

Thank you so much again to all those who gave generously of their time, creating beautiful Santa Shoeboxes for the Christmas party for 100 Sigagule children. It was a great success and fun was had by all.

Well done to Shirley-Anne Berretta of the SAME Foundation and Janine Scorer for organising this important, fun event!



As always a heartfelt thank you to all those who have assisted by transporting donations from Johannesburg to the reserve and to the generous donors who contributed a walking stick and moon boot, brand new baby clothes and accessories, blankets, toys and ladies clothing via Bags of ♥ in Dainfern.. We are also so grateful to the Stithian's boys who collectively donated a wheelchair which will be used by a 95 year old woman within the Sigagule community.

If you would like to keep abreast with current needs/initiatives or assist with outreach in any way, please connect with Susan Harwood on 0832282546 to join the Olifants Outreach WhatsApp group.

The Balule Trust

At the outset of our campaign in 2020, to provide funds to the SAME After School Child Care Centre in Sigagule Village, the Maseke community and the Apostolic Church in Phalaborwa for essential basic food product, we fed (between 800 and 1000 daily) vulnerable orphans and AIDS related children, as well as families who were without breadwinners (primarily employed by the tourist industry) due to the devastating effect of COVID-19 job losses. This remarkable achievement was made possible by the generous donations made to the Trust by members, users and friends of both Olifants South and North – and as always, we send our sincere appreciation and thanks.

Sadly, we had erroneously predicted that the worst of the effects of the pandemic would be over by January 2021. However with the spiralling infection rate brought about by the second phase, we will continue providing the above organisations with funds for essential food, albeit sadly, at a substantially reduced rate.

We are excited that the new Trust classroom at the After School Child Care Centre is ready for the children when they return to school and we're delighted too, that this building has enabled the Centre to restructure the clinic to it's former size – a much-needed more practical facility essential in these desperate times.

The Trust is also committed, together with Eco Children, a Klaserie Nature Reserve NGO, and Southern Cross School, to a three-way co-sponsorship of five bursaries this year for gifted children at Southern Cross School in Hoedspruit where all children receive an eco-based environmentally aware education.

Banking details of the Trust

First National Bank (FNB), Bryanston, South Africa
Account number: 6233 678 7877 Clearing Code: 250-017
Swift number: FIRZAJJXXX

Please reference EFT payments with your name.

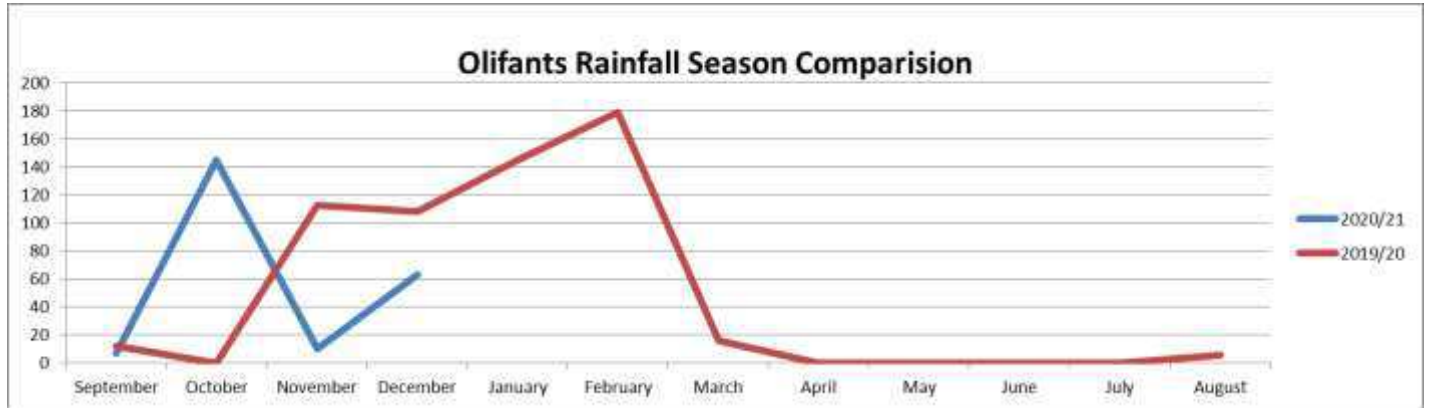


MEMBERS UPDATE

THE WEATHER REPORT

Rainfall for December has measured in at 63mm and brings our season total to 225mm received so far. Last year at this stage, we received slightly more rain, with 233mm recorded.

Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season

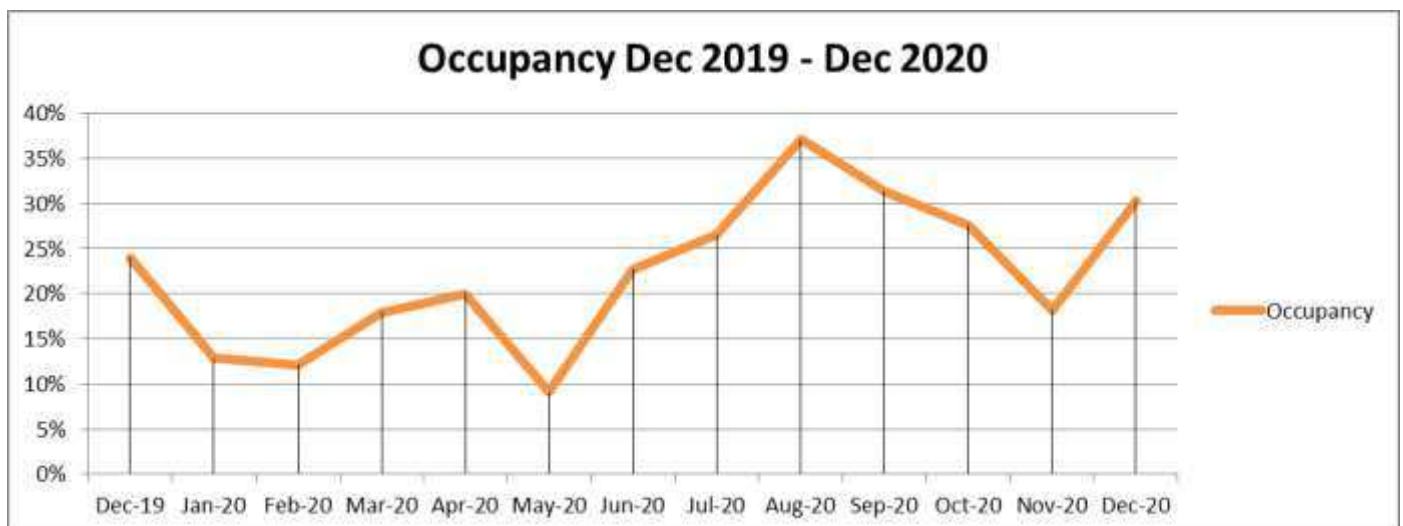


December was dominated by hot and humid days. We have not seen the temperature rise over 35 this month but the humidity has certainly made it feel lthat way! We have had a couple of cooler rainy days to break the heat, which has brought some relief.

The El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is currently in a La Niña state and the forecast indicates that it will most likely remain and strengthen towards a strong La Niña state during summer. With the likelihood of a strong La Niña during mid-summer, there are increased chances of above-normal raiins in the summer rainfall areas during that season. The South African Weather Service will continue to monitor and provide updates on any future assessments that may provide more clarity on the current expectations for the coming seasons.

OCCUPANCY

December ended off with an average occupancy of 30% compared to 24 % last year. Although the month started off moderately busy with around 16 units in residence, we saw a maximum of 43 units in residence towards the end of the month over the festive period. We ended the 2020 year with an annual average occupancy of 22% compared to an average of 10% in 2019.



Oasis Water at ORGR

Great news! Our office at Olifants River Game Reserve now has the facility to refill your 5l, 10l and 25l water containers with Purified RO3 Oasis drinking water. Oasis has installed a 750l tank with a circulation pump and Ozonator, enabling us to refill your drinking water containers expediently, on site.

The built-in Ozonator and circulation pump in the tank ensures the water is always potable.

Why Ozonated Water?

1. Ozone is effective over a wide pH range and with stronger germicidal properties than chlorination, rapidly reacts with bacteria, viruses and protozoans,.
2. It has a very strong oxidizing power with a short reaction time.
3. The treatment process does not add chemicals to the water.
4. Ozone can eliminate a wide variety of inorganic, organic and microbiological problems, doing away with taste and odour problems.

A further fantastic advantage of this facility allows us to move away from the single-use plastic water bottles previously sold in the shop. These will be phased away in the next few weeks and will no longer be available for sale.

Staff Christmas Party

On Boxing Day, we hosted our staff Christmas party to celebrate the end of a challenging year and thank the team for their hard work. It was a fun afternoon where the staff and their families enjoyed a great meal with some refreshing beverages and music topped off the mix of festivities, when everyone danced away the woes of the Covid year. Page managed to steal the show again by entertaining the children for most of the afternoon!



Helicopter Scenic Flights

Ever wondered what the Fish Eagles and Vultures see? Now you can explore Olifants and our little corner of the Lowveld from above! Wildlife Helicopter Solution is owned and managed by Gerry McDonald who is our go-to Pilot for any wildlife and anti-poaching work. – and he is hands-down the best pilot in the area. If you would like to take part in this thrilling experience, simply contact the office and we will make a booking on your behalf the day before you fly. Photographic enthusiasts may request a “doorless” experience. Rates apply for 1-3 people :

30 minutes	R3,660.00
45 minutes	R5,500.00
1 hour	R7,330.00



Railway line Old Fence Pole Clean Up

We have removed most of the redundant steel fence uprights from the railway line road on ORGR. The poles were used to hold up the fence enclosing the railway line and have been an eyesore for some time. Currently stockpiled at our workshop, the poles will be collected by Transnet at their earliest convenience.

Staff Profile

This month we feature Matimba Shingane, who is an all-rounder, working diligently as part of the maintenance crew on the reserve.

Matimba was born in Phalaborwa and grew up in the local area. In 2016, he began his career working for a construction company in the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate and was later employed by Big Five during which time he worked with them in Olifants for a year. In 2018 he was employed temporarily by Olifants and later in 2019 took up permanent employment with us. Matimba has strong family ties on the reserve. Lucas is his Grandfather and Louis is his uncle. He has no children of his own, yet has a steady relationship with a lady back home.

At 26 years old, he is an ambitious young man and enjoys working on his house when he is home for his leave. He enjoys developing his home and even manufactures his own bricks so he can build extensions and improve his house.



FINAL WORD

Well, that's a wrap for 2020 and all from us for this month! We wish every one of you and your loved ones a very happy new year filled with happiness, love and above all else, health! We look forward to seeing you soon in our corner of this pristine paradise. Until then....

Best Regards

Nick and the management team and staff

