

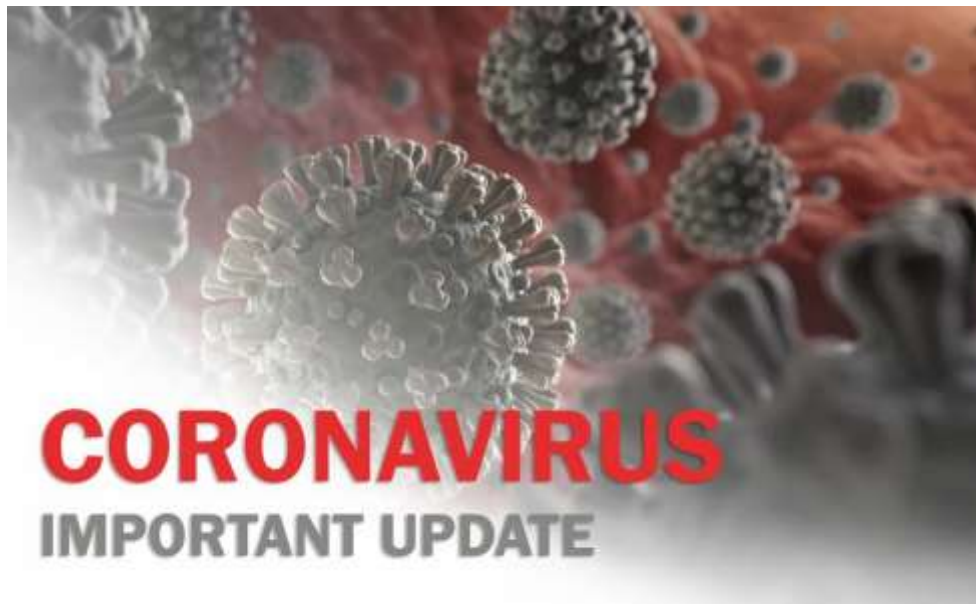


ORGR BUSH TELEGRAPH
THE JANUARY 2021 EDITION



Hello Olifants Community!

Greetings from a lush green reserve! The vegetation is currently at its peak and has not been in such fantastic condition for many years. We have had an eventful beginning to 2021 with Eloise bringing us a very full river and our little corner of paradise providing us with memorable sightings and experiences.



The daily infection rate in South Africa has steadily declined and President Cyril Ramaphosa has lifted some of the restrictions put in place at the end of last year. We have amended the ORGR Covid protocols accordingly, as set out below:

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 management staff. Ideally, the social distancing of two meters should be adhered to at all times.

2. Office Access to Members

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. Use of the office and boardroom facilities to connect to the internet will not be allowed until further notice.

3. Use of the Clubhouse and pool

There is no longer a need to book the clubhouse and pool in advance. We do ask that we keep crowds to a minimum and that you continue to sign the access register and sanitize surfaces after use.

Thank you all for your cooperation and support in our attempt to minimize the spread of Covid-19. We long for the day that we can give you all a warm hug – but until such time, our elbows will have to do!

THE GAME DRIVE

Birding was been excellent on the reserve with quite a few special sightings reported. Most noteworthy has been the Sooty Falcon which was spotted around Wild Dog Pan - an excellent record for the area. The pack of three wild dogs has been seen on a few occasions and another pack of eight sighted around Wild Dog Pan. Both our resident lion prides have produced some superb viewing, with the Pom Pom pride dominating the river and the Mashatu pride East of the railway line. Ezulwini the big tusker wandered onto Olifants towards the end of January but did not spend too much time here. We're hoping he returns in February. There was a fantastic sighting of a crocodile taking down a waterbuck in front of unit 7 and one of our camera traps picked up an aardvark at Natural Pan which is quite exciting! Overall, January produced some awesome game viewing despite challenging conditions in the field. We thank all those who post their photos on the Telegram group for use in this newsletter.



Creature Feature: Golden Orb Web Spider

With the last two years of excellent rainfall, the Golden Orb (banded-legged nephilia genus of arachnids) web spiders, have been flourishing on Olifants. There are many species of nephila around the world, often referred to as Golden Orb weavers, Giant Wood spiders or Banana spiders.



The genus name roughly translated from Ancient Greek, means “fond of spinning” - a testament to the enormous webs they weave. They have been observed starting at the top of a six meter tree and stretching as much as two meters across. Whilst most other spider webs are short-lived, these impressive structures can last for years.

The females are the ones who weave the webs and can be up to ten times the size of the males, which typically free-load on the females' webs, eating and resting. When a male wants to mate, he'll either “tap, tap, tap” on the edge of the web to make sure the female is in a good mood, or he'll bring her a tasty morsel to eat! While she's eating and distracted by her yummy snack, he'll sneak up, stab her abdomen with his male part, injecting his semen, and then run away before she can eat him. The females have a “pantry” section on their web where they can store up to fifteen future meals or possible bait for fresh food. The ladies are very tidy, as they vertically arrange these foodstuffs, and keep them wrapped in silk to prevent dehydration.

The silk of this species is so incredibly strong that it can even trap small birds. There is a theory that if were possible to weave a line of the silk to a thickness of a small pencil, it would be able to withstand and repel a 747 jumbo jet at maximum speed! In some tribal communities, the web silk is used to make fishing lures and traps. Fishermen on the islands of the Indo-Pacific roll the nets into a ball and throw them into the water. The ball unrolls and is then used as a net to catch baitfish. Efforts to use the silk commercially for the manufacture of cloth have failed. However, there has been some promising research on their silk in the field of tissue engineering for medical use.

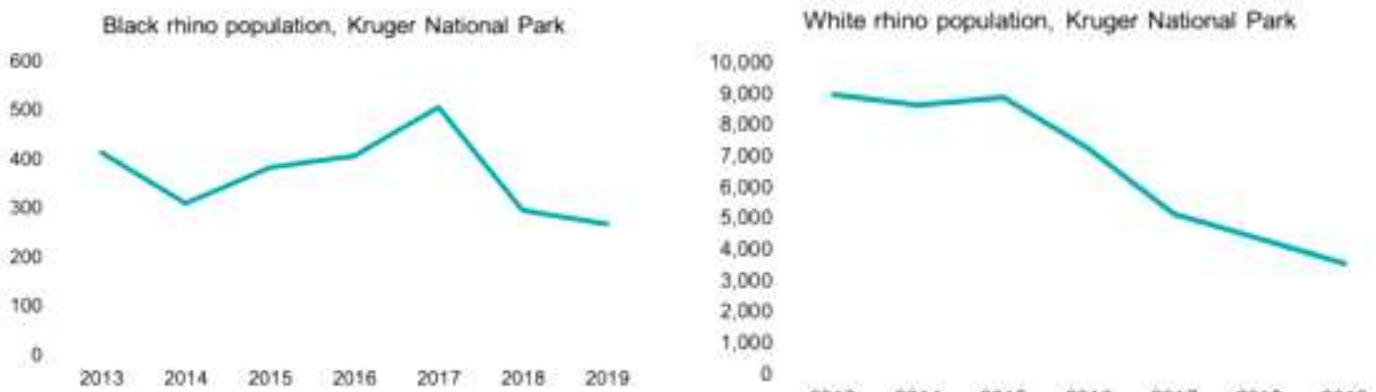
Quick Facts

- These spiders are diurnal, sedentary and web-bound
- Webs are not often dismantled and can last for several years
- There are 11 African species in the genus
- Their venom is harmless to man
- It is not the largest spider but makes the largest and strongest web, deriving its name from the golden colour of its silk.
- To negate potential damage to the web, the female often leaves a visible line of insect husks on the web (likened to a safety strip across a glass door)
- The tiny males can steal the female's food without her even noticing.
- Females live slightly longer than males
- The eggs are buried in the ground
- The spiderlings are not fully developed when they hatch, but once they are, they move apart from their siblings to avoid cannibalism
- The web silk (gathered by some traditional folk) can be used to manufacture fishing lures, traps, nets, bird snares and is medicinally used to stop bleeding.

Rhino News

In 2020, 394 rhinos were poached for their horn in South Africa. This is 33% less than the 594 killed in 2019. Although this is great news we are still on the brink of an ecological disaster with Kruger rhino populations plummeting by almost 70% in the last 10 years. While overall poaching rates have indeed declined markedly from the peak reached in 2013–2016 (when more than 1,000 were killed each year), rhino experts have cautioned that the lower poaching rates over the past few years are still a matter of significant concern, because there are now fewer animals to sustain natural breeding increases.

Today, according to a recent report by South Africa National Parks (SANParks), there are just 3,529 white rhinos and 268 black rhinos left in Kruger. The Park continues to be home to the world's largest rhino population, but these numbers are a stark reminder of the fragility of this vulnerable pachyderm. We cannot afford to let this downward trend continue. These latest population counts from Kruger National Park beg the question: are there now simply too few rhinos for poachers to find?



Of course, when such a huge number of rhinos is killed, this has significant knock-on effects. Between 2014 and 2017, the total number of rhinos born in Kruger fell by almost 60%. Undoubtedly poaching has played a significant role in this decline, as has the lack of vegetation (due to an extended period of drought) that rhinos need to breed successfully. These numbers paint a very dark picture, i.e. that ten years of conservation work have been undone. Now the numbers are clear, we must work harder than ever to protect rhinos from poaching. It won't be easy, especially with the financial strain that Covid-19 has already placed on rhino conservation projects across the world. However, there's no other option. If we are to ensure that rhino numbers increase, we've got to support rangers' protection efforts and ensure that communities living on the borders of national parks and reserves see the benefits of living alongside wildlife. We've seen what happened with the Northern white rhino...there are only two of this species left in the whole world – and we can't afford to let that happen to the Southern white rhino.



CONSERVATION

Wild Dog Euthanasia December 2020

On the 30th December, we had the extremely difficult task of euthanizing a male wild dog on the reserve. We have received the results of the lab testing and the diagnosis is as follows:

Post Mortem

The post mortem findings were generally unremarkable except for one kidney which was enlarged and congested while the contralateral kidney was significantly diminished in size with a destroyed cortex and decreased cortico-medullary junction, indicative of a renal aspect to the pathological process. Based on the neurological symptoms though, the vets considered it to be coincidental.

Laboratory Results

Samples were collected for histopathological evaluation, canine distemper testing and the brain was sent for rabies testing. The results came back negative for both rabies and distemper. Histopathology indicated a pyelonephritis which is a purulent infection of the smaller kidney. In the larger kidney, there were areas of necrosis, called infarcts.

Renal infarcts are typical as a result of thrombo-emboli, most commonly associated with vegetative valvular endocarditis where there is a bacterial infection in the body and small nidus's break off and end up travelling through the bloodstream, causing damage through blood flow blockages. They are often found in heart valves which was not seen in this case, when the heart was opened, meaning the infectious emboli must have originated elsewhere, with the possibility of emboli from the contralateral kidney. The pyelonephritis could have multiple causations, which, unfortunately, in a free-roaming individual with no history, is difficult to pin down to anything specific, which is hugely frustrating.

Essentially this wild dog would have been in acute kidney failure which can also explain the neurological symptoms, although not a commonly encountered case in wildlife and more commonly seen in domestic small animals. The failure of the kidneys has a direct result in their ability to filter out uremic toxins, a build-up of which can result in a peripheral neuropathy characterized by - but not exclusive to - increased thirst, weakness, abnormal gait and incoordination. This has a better explanation for the response of the wild dog to my approach, where it appeared to be aware and stressed, having an excessive response to the darting. At the time it did not make sense to me but looking at the results, the picture is a lot clearer. Ultimately, the decision to euthanize was the right one and justified as this wild dog would have died a painful death and we would not have known if we were dealing with something more serious and contagious.

The big positive is that it was neither canine distemper nor rabies, which would have been the end of that pack. Interestingly and something to note which may require further investigation (fortunately one individual in this group is collared) is the fact that the female from this pack which died on Struwig, exhibited some similar kidney issues and there may be something we are still not seeing or picking up. Time will tell.



Sable Plains Rehab Project

We have started a rehabilitation process on the erosion sites in the Sable Plains area. Such sites are growing larger each year and our plan is to halt the erosion and enhance recovery rates. The work involves constructing strategic gabions along the erosion path to slow down the water and trap soil which in turn will assist the area to recover. Branches will be placed to cover the bare areas to encourage vegetation regrowth and the erosion heads will be packed with rocks to prevent further erosion from that point.



Alien Plant Removal Project

During January, we've spent a substantial amount of time and manpower removing large Cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*) from the drainage lines on the reserve; and all the major ones have been cleared. The Olifants River has large amounts of this alien plant that is scheduled to be removed soon. The focus was to eliminate this species from drainage lines where we can control the spread. Unfortunately, the Olifants River Cocklebur population gets replenished from upstream sources every time the river runs high.



Cocklebur originates from South America and competes with indigenous species along riverbanks. Its spiny burs adhere to animal fur and become entwined in tails, manes, and coats of wildlife causing much discomfort.

Railway Impact Study

The wet season portion of the railway impact study is currently being conducted and the research team has reinstalled its camera traps along the railway to capture animals moving across and adjacent to the railway line. You can expect to see Sibos walking along the railway from time to time collecting data of animal mortalities caused by the train.

KEY			
PROGRESS (P)	SCHEDULED	ON-TRACK	COMPLETED
CHALLENGES (C)	NONE	MINOR	MAJOR
PROJECT BACKGROUND			
#	Task	Objective(s)	Focus (group; size)
1	Assess the use of the railway by wildlife.	Determine the frequency of the railway use among wildlife species. Determine the seasonal and habitat variation on the railway use among wildlife species. Compare the activity patterns among wildlife species on railway use.	Mammals; Medium and large.
2	Assess wildlife mortalities on the railway.	Determine the effect of season, habitat, activity patterns and train volume on the occurrence of rail mortalities.	All.
3	Assess the proximity of wildlife on the railway.	Determine the variation in the occurrence of wildlife species closer to the railway than further away from the railway.	Mammals; Medium and large.
4	Assess the use of underpasses by wildlife.	Determine wildlife species that use the underpasses and the frequency of use.	All.
PROJECT PROGRESS			
Task	P	C	Details
1			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methodology Motion-triggered camera traps are used to monitor the movement of passing trains and wildlife on the railway line. Camera traps are secured on the steel posts, facing directly along the railway, and covering a 1 km stretch. Camera traps are deployed for a period of 6 weeks before moved to another site that consist of a different habitat type. Findings Data capture still underway. Impala, Elephant, Plain zebra, and Giraffe are among wildlife species with the highest capture on the railway line. Among carnivores, Spotted Hyaena is captured the most.

REACHING OUT

This month we have received the most amazing donations once again and will be gifting 45 Bags to pre-school children in Maseke. The 45 bright pencil cases and beanies were handmade by Gen Thomas, the colouring books, sharpeners, pencil crayons, and wax crayons were donated by Catherine Magnifico and we placed them into branded Bags of ♥ A big thank you so much to all involved!

Just a note here that we are currently looking into organising branded bags for the Balule Outreach Trust which will be a great asset!

For Sigagule, we received a brand new compact projector, lots of arts & crafts materials as well as a large bag of new shoes. We would like to start a collection of raincoats and Wellington boots for all ages for the less fortunate in the surrounding villages to keep them warm and dry which is a challenge with the current torrential rains.



Please contact Susan Harwood on 083 228 2546 if you would like to join the Olifants/Balule Outreach WhatsApp Group or if you have any donations/enquiries/suggestions.

The Balule Trust Banking details:

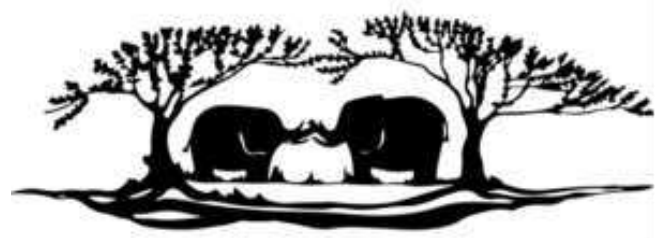
First National Bank (FNB) Bryanston

Account number: 62336787877

Clearing code: 250-017

Swift Number: FIRNZA JJXXX

Please reference EFT Payments with your name.

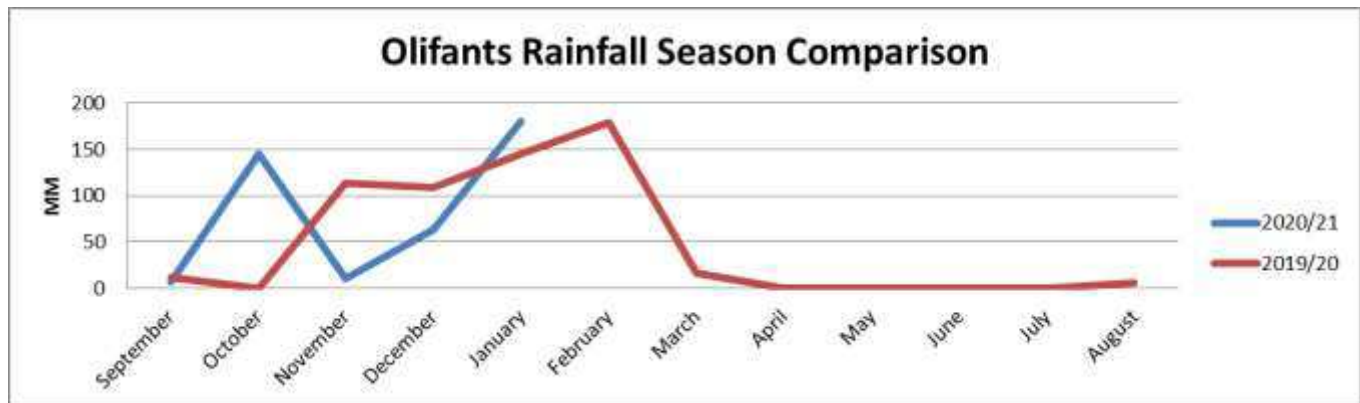


MEMBERS UPDATE

THE WEATHER REPORT

Rainfall for January has come in at 180 mm with the season total of 405,5 mm compared to 378,5mm for the same time last year.

Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season



Cyclone Eloise

Although we had some associated rainfall from Cyclone Eloise, Olifants only received 90mm of rain during the cyclone's passing through South Africa. Other areas such as Ebenezer Dam in the mountains received a total of 560 mm during this period and the catchment area for the Blyde river also had torrential rains which pushed huge volumes of water down the escarpment into the Lowveld.



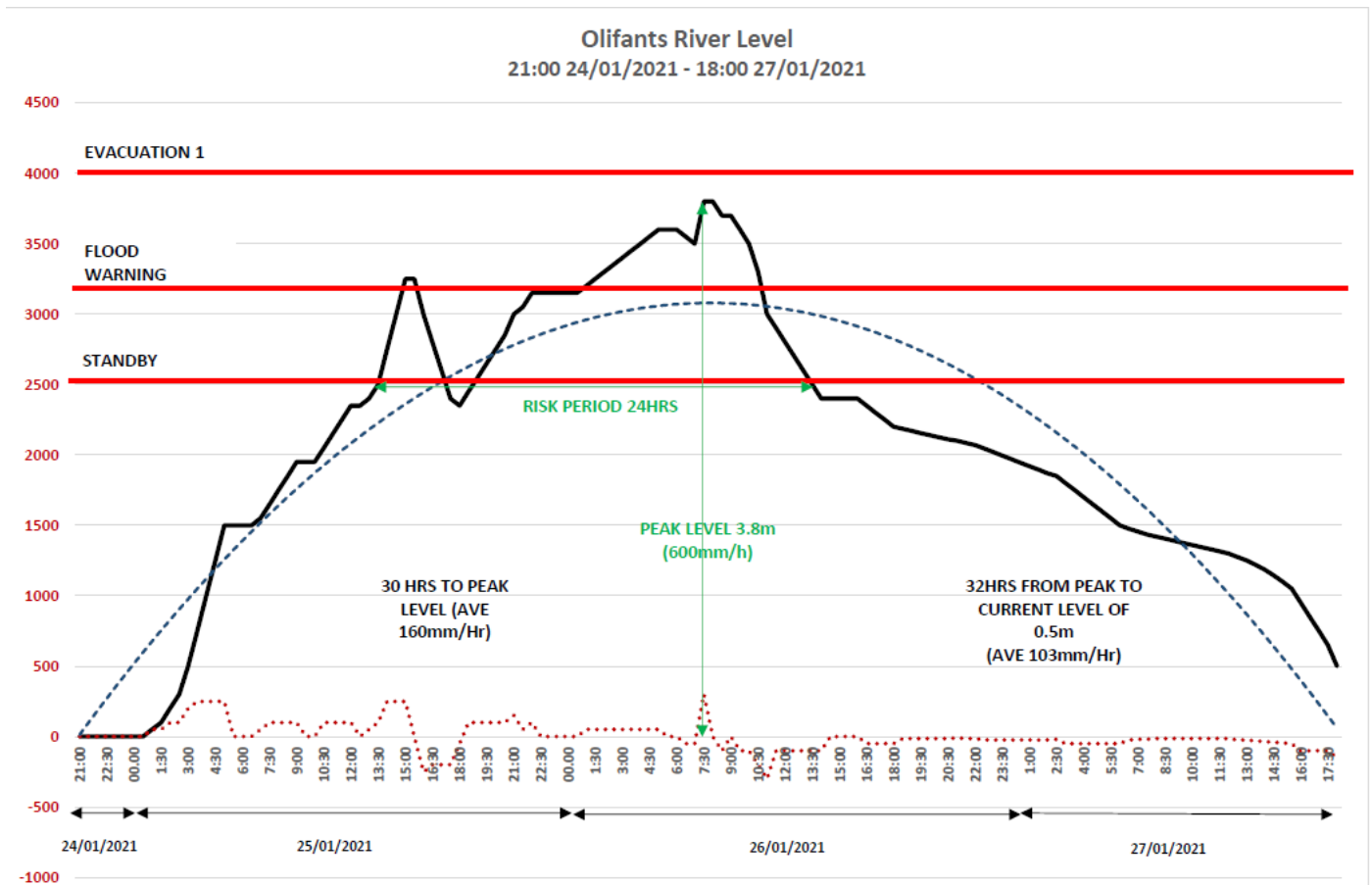
Tropical Cyclone Eloise's origins can be traced to a disturbance over the central portion of the South-West Indian Ocean basin that developed into a tropical depression on 16 January and strengthened into a tropical storm on 17 January, though the storm had limited organization. On the next day, the storm entered a more favourable environment and soon intensified to a severe tropical storm on 18 January. Late the following day, Eloise made landfall in northern Madagascar as a moderate tropical storm, bringing with it heavy rainfall and flooding. The storm traversed Madagascar and entered the Mozambique Channel in the early hours of 21 January. After moving south-westward across the Mozambique Channel for an additional 2 days, Eloise strengthened into a Category 1 equivalent cyclone, due to low wind shear and high sea surface temperatures.

Early on 23 January, Eloise peaked as a Category 2 equivalent tropical cyclone on the Saffir-Simpson scale as the center of the storm began to move ashore on Mozambique. Shortly afterward, Eloise made landfall just north of Beira, Mozambique, before rapidly weakening. Subsequently, Eloise weakened into a remnant low overland on 25 January, dissipating soon afterwards.

With all the rains falling in the Blyde River and Olifants catchments areas, we saw the Olifants river rise dramatically. It has been a full-flowing River since the 23rd of January and has breached the causeway twice during this time. We kept a close eye on the water levels and were in constant communication with sources upstream for early warning signs of a more serious increase in the levels. Thankfully we're not in any danger of receiving damaging floods during this period. The river peaked at 07h30 on the 26th of January and started subsiding from there but later rose again to similar levels on the 1st of February when a flush of water came off the mountains after heavy rains fell in the catchment.



This second rise was short-lived and the river dropped to comfortable levels fairly quickly. The graph below indicated the flow rate on the river recorded on Parsons during the cyclone's passing.



OUR FEBRUARY NIGHT SKY

In a nutshell...

Moon

Date	Time	Phase
04/02	19h37	Last Quarter
11/02	21h05	New Moon
19/02	20h47	First Quarter
27/02	10h17	Full Moon

Moon – Earth Relations

Perigee: 370 116 km on the 03/02 at 21h03

Apogee: 404 467 km on the 18/02 at 12h21

Planet Visibility

Mars (near Taurus) visible in the evening sky.

Mercury, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn are visible in the morning sky, near Capricornus.

Some easy to identify bright stars

Rigel: blue supergiant in Orion

Betelgeuse: red supergiant in Orion

Procyon: yellowish white star in Canis Minor

Sirius: brightest star in the night sky, located in Canis Major

Antares: red supergiant in Scorpius

Arcturus: red giant in Boötes

Spica: brightest bluish-white star in Virgo

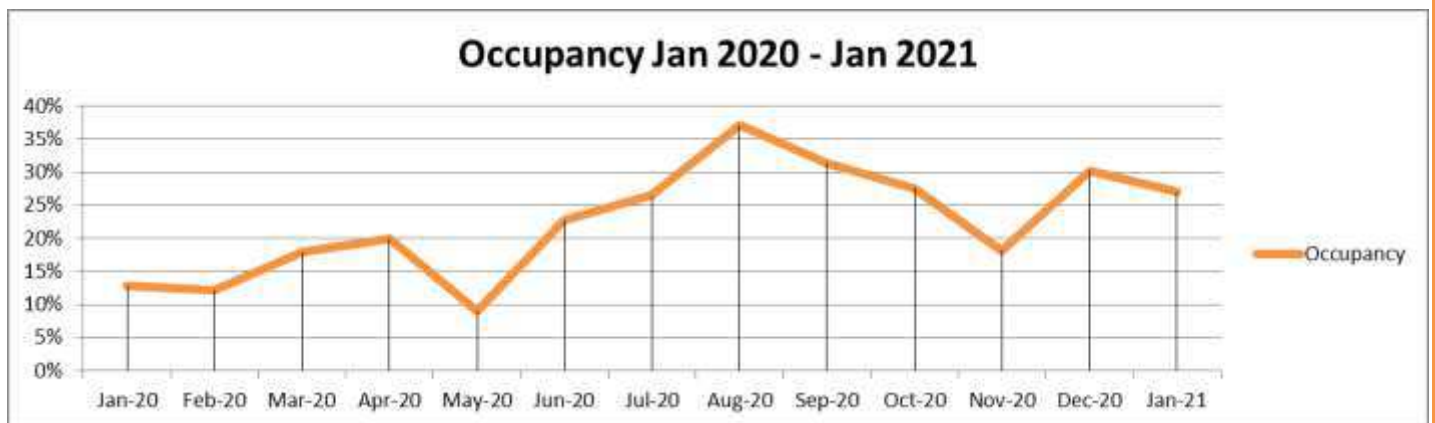
Canopus: yellowish-white star in Carina

Altair: a white star, brightest in Aquila



OCCUPANCY

January ended off with an average occupancy of 27% compared to 13% at the same time last year. The month started off extremely busily with 40 plus units in residence after the festive season and slowed down to a minimum of 15 units in residence during mid-month. The month ended off between 15 and 25 units occupied on the reserve. The annual average occupancy is now at 23% compared to 10% in 2019.



Oasis Water at ORGR

The installation of the Oasis water facility at ORGR has been a great success with over 1000l of water already sold from the office. This system has proven to be incredibly convenient and very popular with our members. If you have not made use of this facility yet, give it a try on your next visit.



Farmwatch Big Birding Day

Farmwatch will be running a Big Birding day in the area on the 20th of February 2021. All proceeds will go to the Hoedspruit Farmwatch. This organization plays a very important role in the area as they frequently assist the reserves with support during poaching-related incidents. ORGR Management will be putting a team together and any members who are on the reserve are encouraged to join in this fun day. Registrations must be in by the 17th of February 2021. Details attached to the newsletter email.



ORGR staff Involved in motor vehicle accident

ORGR assists our staff to transport their bulkier goods off the reserve by utilizing the Hilux Bakkie. Recently, some of our Olifants staff and a regular casual worker were involved in an accident on the R40, which resulted in two staff members sustaining serious injuries.

The off-duty group was travelling to Phalaborwa in the bakkie to drop off some personal belongings at home. On the R40 shortly after the Gritjie gate turnoff, their vehicle was rear-ended by a car and Louis, our unit guard, sustained a broken leg and minor head injuries. He has had an operation to repair the damaged leg and will make a full recovery. Israel, one of our regular casuals sustained a more serious head injury and is sadly still in a critical condition in Hospital. Our prayers and thoughts go out to him and his family. A case has been opened against the driver responsible for the accident and SAPS are investigating.

Need a Braai?



We have access to these locally produced Barrel Braais, crafted in Hoedspruit, using steel drums and wood trimmings. If you are looking for a great braai to tan some chops, we have a sample unit located at the office for you to look at. We will put you in touch with the manufacturers.



Staff Profile

This month we feature Nomsa Leyane who is part of our Housekeeping team at ORGR.

Born in 1973 in Bushbuck Ridge, Nomsa is the youngest of six siblings. She has five older brothers and one older sister (Lindiwe in ORGR reception). Nomsa has two children of her own, namely a boy and a girl.

Prior to starting work as a temp at Olifants in 2009, Nomsa ran a small business selling produce, clothing and accessories in her community and would frequently travel to Johannesburg to purchase stock. Her hobbies include gardening, collecting firewood and running a small spaza shop to satisfy her entrepreneurial instincts. Nomsa joined us on a permanent basis in 2014.



FINAL WORD

That's all, for now, folks, the first month of 2021 is under our belts. We hope to see you all on the reserve soon and in the meantime, stay safe and healthy! Catch you on Sunset Plains for a sundowner.

Best Regards

Nick, the management team & staff

