



ORGR BUSH TELEGRAPH

THE MAY 2021 EDITION

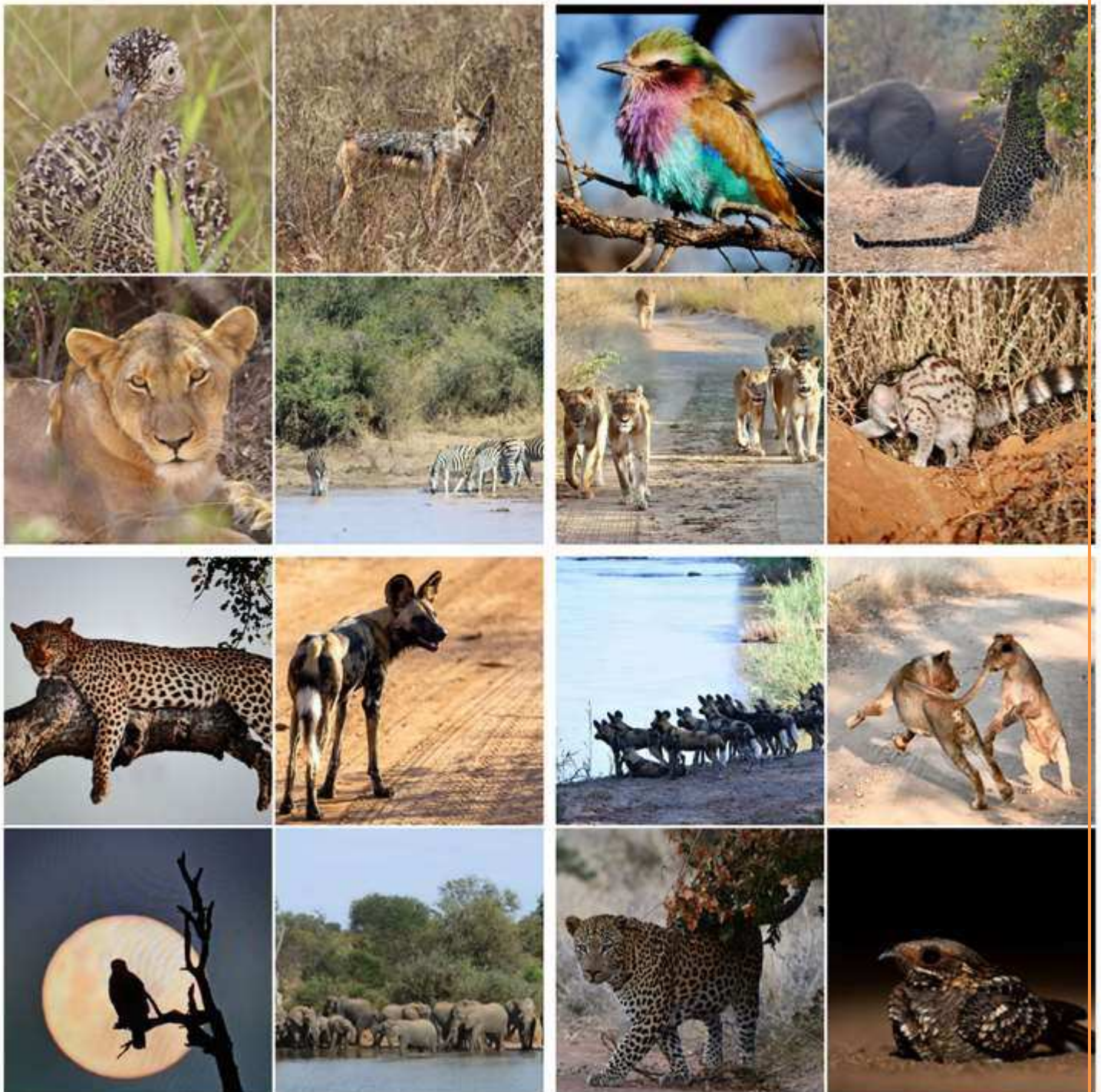


Hello Olifants Community!

Winter is knocking at the door, temperatures in the mornings have become quite chilly but the days are gloriously warm and comfortable. The reserve is still in incredible condition with ample grazing available due to our bumper rainy season. The impala lilies have started flowering, adding a flush of pink to our winter bushveld palette. We have almost reached the midpoint of 2021 and time seems to be trotting along quite rapidly this year.

THE GAME DRIVE

Dryer conditions on the reserve are creating excellent game viewing opportunities, as water points become more concentrated and the vegetation thins out a little. Big cat viewing has been excellent recently with lions and leopards sighted almost daily. Elephant activity on the reserve has also increased with large herds making their way back into the area. Elephant populations in Kruger have risen to 31 500 so we can expect our numbers to keep increasing. General game has been good with giraffe, kudu, zebra, warthog and wildebeest in good numbers. Sharpe's grysbok are also being seen more frequently now with the enhanced visibility. A large pack of wild dogs numbering around 30 or so was also seen on Olifants for a few days. It was an impressive experience seeing such a large group together.



Creature Feature: Nile Crocodile - Here be Dragons

Africa Geographic

When watching any animal in Africa smaller than a rhino approach the water's edge, there is an almost palpable sense of terror to their body language. Slender-limbed antelope skitter backwards and forwards before barely touching the surface with their lips; zebra snort and startle; and even the ferocious lions snarl pre-emptively before quenching their thirst. Wildebeest driven to cross East Africa's mighty rivers pile up on the banks, worked up into a frenzy of fear, too afraid to be the first to make the plunge. And all for good reason.....crocodile!



Beneath the murky waters of Africa's rivers and dams lurk prehistoric predators – lumbering giants whose presence is revealed only by an insidious ripple, waiting to explode in a fury of teeth and water. The wild animals of Africa know this. Stamped across their internal maps over every water source is the message: *here be dragons*.

QUICK INTRODUCTION

Actually neither dragons nor dinosaurs, crocodiles are the paradigm of an evolutionary recipe that proved successful and little about them has changed in the last 100 or so million years. They are perfectly designed apex predators with potentially massive bodies powered by robust muscles, covered in armoured scales and driven by clinical, calculating instinct. Crocodilians are also the ultimate masters of the ambush approach, drawing on their innate reptilian capacity for absolute stillness until launching an assault.

PERFECT PREDATORS

The lack of evolutionary action can be at least partly explained by a successful foundation for exceptional hunting abilities. While younger Nile crocodiles are primarily reliant upon regular meals of invertebrates, amphibians and fish, those that survive to adulthood will attain the status of apex predator, capable of ambushing large prey twice their size including buffalo, giraffe, humans and even young elephants.

Unique among reptiles, crocodiles have a four-chambered heart, improving the efficiency of the transportation of oxygenated blood around the body which, combined with extremely high lactic acid levels, allows them to stay submerged for up to two hours at a time (provided they remain inactive underwater). Specialised muscles attached to the lungs, liver and pelvis can contract to pull the lungs backwards into the body cavity, changing the crocodile's buoyancy and allowing it to submerge without creating ripples and alerting potential prey to their presence.

It is relatively well-known that Nile crocodiles have one of the strongest bite forces in the animal kingdom – some 30 times that of a human at 5,000 pounds per square inch. This is powered by enormous muscles that attach behind the skull and wrap around the lower jaw, allowing the jaw to close (and stay closed) with tremendous strength whilst still maintaining a low profile in the water. There are between 64-68 basic and cone-like teeth rigidly fixed into the jaw, designed to withstand considerable force from every direction. These may be replaced throughout the crocodile's life. When a crocodile pulls its prey into the water, these teeth maintain a grip as the crocodile goes into a "death roll", using its powerful tail to spin the prey underwater until it drowns.

Unspecialised teeth mean that crocodiles cannot chew or bite off chunks of meat so, for larger meals, they tear chunks of flesh away before swallowing them whole, hooves, horns and bones included. Their tracheas are

reinforced to avoid being crushed when swallowing large portions of food and their stomachs distend in every direction to accommodate awkwardly shaped meals. To complete the process, crocodilians produce stomach acid some ten times the strength of a human's gastric acid. Like all reptiles, they are ectotherms, meaning that their metabolisms are slow and large crocodiles can survive for months without a meal.

DOTING MOTHERS

Whilst their approach to hunting is silent and deadly, crocodiles are surprisingly vocal animals and never more so than during the breeding season (the timing of which varies depending upon the area). Males show off by "roaring", slapping their snouts on the water and exhaling sharply, intimidating rivals and attracting females.

Two months after mating, the female selects a suitable nesting site on the shore or in a dry riverbed and digs a hole in which to lay her eggs. The clutch size will vary depending on the size of the female but is usually between 25-80 eggs. Unlike other crocodilian species, the female Nile crocodile does not use moribund vegetation to incubate the eggs so she will be selective in ensuring that the nest receives adequate sunlight to maintain the temperature. Like several other reptile species, crocodiles have temperature-dependent sex determination – if the temperature is between 31.7° and 34.5 °C, the offspring will hatch as males, anything above or below that range will hatch as females.

The mother guards her nest, often aggressively, for the three-month incubation period until the hatchlings begin to make bird-like chirps to indicate their readiness to escape the nest. The female then carefully digs open the nest and may even take the hatchlings in her mouth to water. For up to two years, she will stay close to them, defending them (though the hatchlings hunt for themselves immediately upon leaving the nest).

Despite the best efforts of the mothers, the mortality rate of hatchling Nile crocodiles is exceptionally high. Until they reach a comfortable size, baby crocodiles are faced with a multitude of potential predators: from monitor lizards to birds, and any number of opportunistic mammal species. In some areas, studies indicate that only 10% of the eggs survive to the hatching stage and just 1% of those will reach adulthood.

MANEATERS AND MONSTERS

The young crocodiles approximately double their length during the first two years, spending almost as much of that time on land hunting invertebrates as they do in the water. However, as they grow, their hunting habits become almost entirely aquatic, and they become more dangerous to people.

According to the IUCN Crocodile Specialist Group, Nile crocodiles are responsible for more attacks on humans than any other species of crocodile, including saltwater crocodiles. This is easy to understand in context, given their massive size and widespread distribution throughout the various waterways of much of the African continent. In areas where human populations are reliant on this water for fishing, drinking and bathing encounters with crocodiles are inevitable and on most occasions, fatal. There are no reliable estimates as to the number of people killed by Nile crocodiles every year (in many circumstances, the victim simply disappears or the attack goes unreported). Still, experts estimate that the number of attacks on people exceeds 300 per year. According to the most recent research, 63% of these attacks are fatal. Almost all of these attacks occur near the edge of or in the water.

While their lives are water-dependent, large crocodiles may cover large distances in search of new territory or better resources. They may choose to occupy unlikely-looking wallows or dams in the process. When in doubt, throughout most of southern and East Africa, bodies of water should be treated with caution.

CONCLUSION

There can be no question that Nile crocodiles have acquired a particularly sinister reputation, despite the best efforts of certain conservation television and YouTube personalities. In many ways, they are difficult to sympathise with – powerful, self-contained, and entirely expressionless (with somewhat graphic table manners), they are a throwback to a time when reptiles ruled the planet. Yet while they may be prehistoric, that does not equate to primitive and it is this ancient combination of brawn and stealth that has kept the Nile crocodile at the top of the food chain for millions of years.



CONSERVATION

ORGR K9 Unit Update



The use of canines (K9s) in the fight against poaching is of paramount importance and effective anti-poaching is not possible without the partnership we have with these incredible dogs. With all the tactics and technologies deployed in the field, we rely heavily on mother nature's oldest form of tech, the olfactory receptors. What do dogs have that we don't? For one thing, they possess up to 300 million olfactory receptors in their noses, compared to about six million in humans. And the part of a dog's brain that

is devoted to analyzing smells is, proportionally speaking, 40 times greater than ours. Dogs' noses also function quite differently than our own. When we inhale, we smell and breathe through the same airways within our nose. When dogs inhale, a fold of tissue just inside their nostril helps to separate these two functions. When airflow enters the nose it splits into two different flow paths, one for olfaction and one for respiration.

What this means for us is that our K9s can track a scent as old as 12 hours through the bush over long distances – which is an invaluable tool when human visual tracking is not possible due to vegetation or other



elements. ORGR has three operational scent hounds on the property which can assist in anti-poaching operations throughout Balule. Jan (our primary tracker) is still performing at an astronomical level and is the backbone of the K9 unit. Our youngster Tiya, is still in training and is already tracking trails through the reserve. She will be a superstar in no time and will take the lead K9 role once her training is complete and she is vetted. Little Page is our standby

tracker and can be deployed to track both human and animal scents, which is a very useful tool to have in our repertoire.

Balule Dehorning

The second round of dehorning, focusing on black rhino, has been completed, ensuring that the entire Balule rhino population has been freshly dehorned. Klasserie has also completed their dehorning which means our immediate neighbourhood does not have any suitable horn stock for poachers. The funding for both Klasserie and Balule dehorning has come from Nkombe Rhino this year.



River Clean-up



We sent a team to clean up flood litter from below Unit 82 all the way around the Grootdraai river bend. We will be making regular trips to collect rubbish especially after high water levels in the Olifants River. For the next run, we will engage with members who will be able to join the team in cleaning up our riverfront and enjoy the walk along the Olifants.

Vulture Rescue

A white-backed vulture with a piece of plastic stuck on its head was spotted by concerned members on the evening of May 4th along the Olifants River close to the causeway. Due to the positioning of the plastic, it was a sure death sentence for this bird which was unable to eat.



The Vulpro team was notified and Kerri Wolter and her team responded from Gauteng the following day while Olifants members kept an eye on the bird for a full

day - incredible dedication by Graham and Sandy from unit 4! The following day the bird was darted just before sunrise and treated by Kerri and the vets. This was the first successful darting of a vulture that we are aware of and it worked out very well, enabling us to remove the plastic obstruction. The bird is currently in rehab with Vulpro and will be released back onto Olifants very soon. Information of release will be circulated soonest. Many thanks to all the staff, members, Vulpro team and vets who made this rescue possible.



REACHING OUT

Spreading the Love!

On Friday 23rd April 2021, one of many visits to Sigagule and Maseke communities brought joy and comfort to numerous children and adults. Nick Leuenberger, warden of Olifants River Game Reserve, Peter Eastwood of Tanglewood Foundation, John Anderson of the Balule Outreach Trust (BORT) and Susan Harwood, board member of Olifants River Game Reserve and Trustee of the Trust, visited the SAME Foundation in Sigagule and the Maseke Drop-In Community Centre to catch up and donate various items such as much-needed stationery, vitamins, masks, puzzles, balls, warm clothing, blankets and school shoes. An account of this trip will be featured in the Kruger2Canyon newspaper. Apart from the humanitarian need to look after neighbouring communities, such publicity sends out a vital message which is critical to the socio-political aspect related to APNR reserves west of the KNP. Without these initiatives delivering what they do, we would have more far political pressure on us than there already is.



The incredible work done, particularly by the SAME Foundation is truly beyond words and Bags of Love (Johannesburg charity founded by Susan Harwood) is proud to support this organisation and honoured to contribute to the ORGR and the Trust. A huge thank you to Peter Eastwood of Tanglewood Foundation for the generous contributions – and to numerous individuals as well who support the Balule Trust, enabling them to make dreams come true in these particularly challenging times. Sincere thanks too, to everyone in ORGR who makes donations of clothing, footwear, toys, reading material, bedding etc. via the ORGR Outreach Group.

The founder of the trust, John Anderson, says “Our grateful thanks to all of the donors who have supported us over many years, and for your continued support in our mission to uplift communities within the greater Balule area. The trust is well on its way to accomplishing some of our ever-evolving aims and there is great news on the way about valuable support coming from Balule. Your generous support is the lifeblood which determines our success, both now and into the future.” Those interested in providing financial support to the Trust can do so by donating into their account, details as follows:

FOOD FOR THE SOLE!

Recently, we received a couple of photos from the SAME Foundation showing a young girl called Eli (who attends the aftercare centre in Sigagule) with her old slip-slops which are so worn out and broken she could no longer use them. A second photo shows Eli with her new pair, for which she is incredibly grateful. Just a reminder that it's the little things that are actually the big things! Thanks again to all those members who contributed to our shoe drive.

We are currently collecting warm shoes, blankets & clothing. It's always difficult to ensure there is not repetition in shoe sizes, so please contact Susan Harwood via WhatsApp on 0832282546 for advice on which sizes to buy. Should you wish to become part of the ORGR Outreach Group on WhatsApp, please contact Susan on the same number.

Field Ranger Training Bursary

The Balule Outreach Trust has granted one of our junior field rangers the opportunity to take part in the Advanced Field Ranger Training Course at the Southern African Wildlife College in May. Vusi Sibuyi is a young, dynamic and driven individual who will greatly benefit from this training to develop his career in the conservation industry. We wish him all the best and will report back on his course when it is completed. Thank you to the Balule Outreach Trust and to those who have so kindly donated to the fund.



The Balule Outreach Trust

First National Bank (FNB), Bryanston, South Africa Account number: 6233 678 7877 Clearing Code: 250-017Swift number: FIRNZAJJXXX Please reference EFT payments with your name.

MEMBERS UPDATE

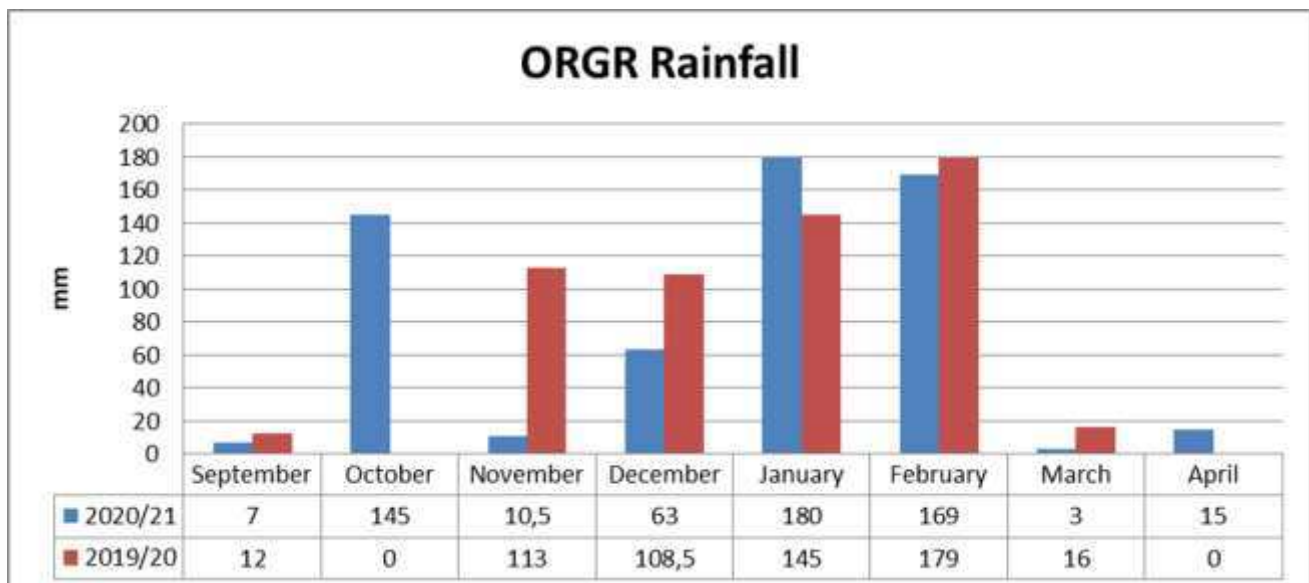
THE WEATHER REPORT

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is currently in a weak La Niña state and the forecast indicates that it will most likely weaken and return to a neutral state for the whole of the winter season. The influence of ENSO on South Africa is however very limited during the winter season and is not expected to have a major impact on southern African weather systems on a seasonal timescale.

Above-normal minimum and maximum temperatures are expected across the country. Climatologically, the inland provinces are not typically associated with much rainfall at all in the winter months. The prospect of a forecast for above-normal rainfall over these regions is therefore not likely to be particularly significant.

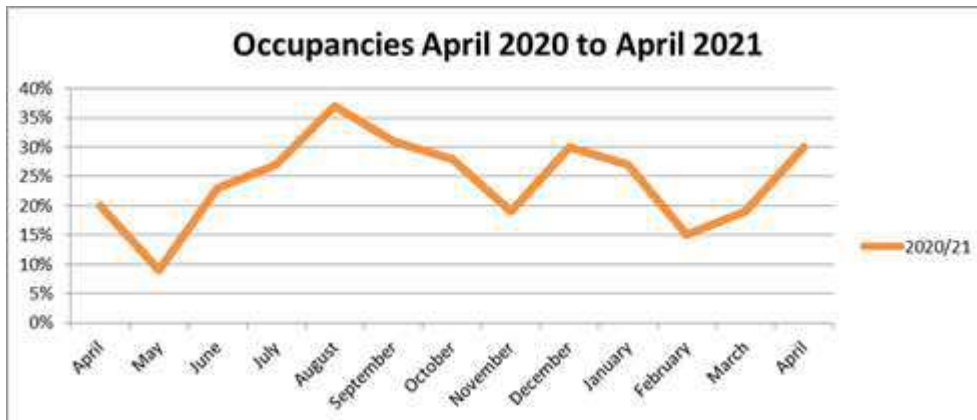
We received 15mm of rain in April in a single event which brings our season total up to 592.5mm compared to last year 579mm..

Rainfall 2020/2021 compared to the previous season



OCCUPANCY

April ended off with an average occupancy of 30%, another busy month on the reserve. We peaked at 51% occupancy with 43 units in residence over the Easter weekend and our quietest day saw 16 units in residence. This brings the average occupancy for the last 12 months up to 24%, steadily increasing as time goes on.



OUR MAY NIGHT SKY

In a nutshell...

Moon

Date	Time	Phase
03/05	21h50	Last
11/05	20h59	New
19/05	21h12	First
26/05	13h13	Full Moon

Moon – Earth Relations

Perigee: 357 311 km on the 26/05 at 03h50
Apogee: 406 512 km on the 11/05 at 23h53

Planet Visibility

Mars is visible in the evening sky, near Gemini
Mercury and Venus are visible after sunset, near Taurus
Jupiter is visible in the morning sky, near Aquarius
Saturn is visible in the morning sky, near Capricornus

Meteor Showers

eta Aquarids: active from the 24th of April to the 12th of May (peaking on the 5th of May)
alpha Scorpiids: active from the 11th of April to the 12th of May (peaking on the 3rd of May)

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
Regulus: blue-white star and the brightest star in Leo
The Pointers: Alpha and Beta Centauri



Infrastructure Updates

Staff Accommodation Upgrades

We have started with some upgrades to the staff compounds as well as building a new block of accommodation. The old ablution block at the lower compound is being converted into four rooms with an additional external bathroom and the top compound is receiving a new block of four rooms with bathrooms. These new facilities will resolve some of the accommodation challenges we've been facing with existing staff and will allow us to expand on the staff complement and keep up with the high service demands we're experiencing on the reserve.



Rhino Pan Upgrade

We have also started work on the Rhino Pan upgrade project. This will include a newly refurbished bathroom and ground floor, area, a new (safer) staircase connecting to the upper level, a new hardwood deck and some cleaning up of the thatch roof. We estimate this project to be complete by mid to end June. We look forward to unveiling this improved facility to our members very soon!

Clubhouse

We have repaired the lower concrete step leading to the swimming pool and have also installed a new handrail along the centre of the stairs, making for a safer ascent and descent in that area!



Radio Network Migration

A decision has been made to migrate our radio network from mid-band to digital. The current mid-band system and equipment is no longer supported by many manufacturers and they are no longer producing good quality repeaters in the mid-band format, so we are unable to put off the migration any longer. Should our repeater fail, there are no viable mid-band replacements to get our radio network operational again. The migration plan will allow members two years to slowly migrate from mid-band to digital as both platforms will run side by side for this transition period.

There will be two options to choose from, namely basic operational radio and a more advanced radio with additional features such as direct private calls, GPS and other useful tools. Costings, timings and more information will be sent out as soon as we have finalized them. If you are considering purchasing a new radio any time soon, we advise you to hold out until we have completed the migration in getting a digital radio device once we are up and running.

Struwig Traversing on Lisbon B

Recently some users have queried the traversing of Lisbon B by a “Struwig” game vehicle. Note that this vehicle is permitted to traverse this area as this was a condition of the sale of Lisbon B in 2004. In terms of the agreement, Struwig is permitted one vehicle to traverse Lisbon B per day provided it adheres to all Olifant’s’ rules and regulations and game viewing protocols. For the sake of good neighbourly relationships, please rather report any transgressions of the rules and regulations or game viewing protocols to the office instead of confronting the driver of the vehicle. The Struwig vehicle will have access to our radio channel to enable you to communicate at sightings.

“Staff” Member of the Month

This month we feature someone who is not an employee of Olifants River Game Reserve but is actively involved on the reserve. Some of you would have already met Nic Daly (aka “Skraal”) on the ORGR guided walks.

Nic is currently part of our anti-poaching unit as a volunteer assisting the team and greater Balule APU where needed. He was born in Johannesburg as the middle sibling of five children and attended St Alban’s college in Pretoria where he matriculated. Nic spent a year exploring South Africa after finishing school, then pursued his passion for working in the bush. He enrolled in the Field Guiding Course with Eco training where he achieved his Trails Guide qualification. Nic then spent a year as a back-up trails guide walking in the Makuleke in Kruger, gaining experience in a dangerous game area. His relationship with ORGR started when we initiated the guided walking experience last year and needed a qualified back-up guide to assist us. During his time with us, Nic has been exposed to our anti-poaching unit and developed a personal goal to make a difference in protecting our wildlife.



In November last year, Nic took part in the Advanced Field Ranger training at the Southern African Wildlife College and received his formal qualification as a Field Ranger. He has spent the last couple of months with our team, being mentored and gaining invaluable experience as he looks for a permanent position in the industry.

FINAL WORD

Well, that’s all for this month! We hope to see you all on the reserve soon and look forward to catching up over a drink on Sunset Plains. In the meantime, stay safe, healthy & warm!

Best Regards

Nick, the management team & staff