



NEWSLETTER

April 2022 Issue

ORGR QUICK FACTS

Established in 1979
Protected Area since 1993
Size: 6739Ha
River Frontage: 13km
Average Altitude: 400m
Average Rainfall: 490mm
Roads: 222km
Impala Population: 1589
Elephant Population: 220
Lion Population: 15
Hippo Population: 19
Permanent Staff: 29
Members and Users: 337
Days without rhino loss: 545
Verified Best Place on Earth!

DEAR OLIFANTS FAMILY

I hope you are all well. It's April...with a third of 2022 already behind us and the Easter Holidays are knocking at the door!

The reserve has had some excellent late rains in March after 6 weeks without a drop falling. These rains have greened up the reserve again and topped up the waterholes in preparation for the forthcoming dry season.

If you think you missed the March Newsletter, don't worry, there wasn't one ...and I will be publishing the ORGR Newsletter bi-monthly going forward.

I hope you enjoy the April issue, filled with updates and stories from our wonderful reserve.

“Look deep into Nature....And you will understand everything better” – Albert Einstein



OLIFANTS PEDAL POWER FUNDRAISING EVENT

Thank you to all our Members for the overwhelmingly positive response to our proposed cycling event at the end of July to raise much-needed funds for our surrounding communities and Anti-Poaching projects. We already have just under 50 cyclists booked for the event. Further information will be circulated soonest, but here is a short recap of what to expect during the event:

- The event will take place on Saturday 30th and Sunday 31st of July at our very own Olifants River Game Reserve!
- The Cycle tour will begin at 7 am on both mornings starting at the Club House
- Three pelotons of cyclists will be entered in three categories:
 - Competitive Social Category
 - Social Category
 - Very Social Category
- Entry fee will be R10 000 per cyclist
- Entry Fee includes:
 - Participation in the event
 - A Goody Bag of sponsored Items
 - A Welcome Function on Friday 29th at the Clubhouse at 17h00
 - A Braai on Saturday 30th at the Clubhouse and Prize-giving.
- A small auction will also be hosted on Saturday evening to augment the funds raised.
- We are asking initially to limit the number of cyclists per home to four participants, given the popularity and enquiries we have had already.
- Once we ascertain the uptake, we will review if there is a possibility of adding additional cyclists per unit.
- Members are accountable and asked to take care of guests outside of the morning cycle rides and the evening events at the Club House.
- Spouses/Partners are welcome and will also be hosted at the Clubhouse events planned.



Please contact the office for further details on the event.



ORGR Game Drive

Sightings have been phenomenal recently. Just have a look at the gallery below, comprising members' photos, which speak for themselves. We are entering the peak of the game viewing season very soon with conditions becoming optimal for observing the creatures that call ORGR home! Some great news is that the old Pom Pom female is still around and moving with the pride. Our rhino monitoring cameras have been picking up regular Aardvark activity around Sable Dam, so if you are on the hunt for these elusive creatures, it's a good place to start.





CREATURE FEATURE: SOUTHERN GROUND HORNBILL



Nothing quite compares to the moment that morning breaks over the African bushveld. Through the strident calls of francolins, kingfisher trills, and melodious cuckoos cuts a low, booming sound – a primitive, hollow and deeply evocative duet that brings to mind an ancient instrument. It is the voice of Africa’s thunderbird: the Southern ground-hornbill. This charismatic bird is one of Africa’s most iconic bird species. And the dawn chorus would simply not be the same without the haunting sound of the thunderbird.

THE BASICS

The Southern ground-hornbill (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*)

is the largest member of the hornbill family by far – a stocky bird around the size of a wild turkey, weighing anywhere between 2.0 to 6.2kg. Other than the fringe of white primary feathers on the edges of their wings, they are almost entirely clad in plumage of glossy ebony feathers. Their faces are characterised by vivid patches of bare crimson skin, giving the vague impression that they have been smacked in the face by an overripe tomato. Adult females can be easily distinguished by a patch of violet-blue skin below the beak that extends down the throat. Though these bright patches likely play a significant role in intraspecies communication, recent research has shown that, along with the casque (an extension of the maxilla bone on the beak), these wattles play a role in thermoregulation.

Ground-hornbills can and do fly – surprisingly gracefully for such large birds – but spend 70% of their days on the ground (hence the name). Their fierce yellow-green eyes are lined by a thick layer of long eyelashes that help to protect them from dust, sticks, and other risky realities of life spent foraging at ground level. Ground-hornbills are fierce avian apex predators, feeding on everything from snakes to small mammals. They use a combination of robust, scaly legs and a mighty beak to subdue prey. Though often described as omnivorous, most research indicates that they are almost exclusively carnivorous, with the bulk of their diet consisting of arthropods.

Ground-hornbills live in highly territorial groups that occupy individual ranges of 100-250kms (or is this meant to be “square?”) (depending on the type of habitat and quality of resources available). The consequence of this is that, despite a relatively large distribution across 16 countries in southern and East Africa and parts of Central Africa, they occur at relatively low densities. They are among the continent’s most threatened birds and are allocated an overall classification of “vulnerable” on the IUCN Red List. Southern ground-hornbills belong to the *Bucorvus* genus along with their close relatives, Abyssinian ground-hornbill (*Bucorvus abyssinicus*) of northern sub-Saharan Africa and West Africa.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Southern ground-hornbills are obligate cooperative breeders – the largest known cooperative breeding bird in the world. They live in groups of up to twelve individuals, usually consisting of the breeding pair and male helpers from previous clutches. These (typically male) offspring delay dispersal for years to help care for future generations. Though female offspring may remain with the parents for a few years, only one adult female is tolerated in a group, and breeding is strictly between the breeding pair. This babysitting and caregiving experience is a vital learning curve – individuals that do not have around six years of helper experience do not breed successfully upon maturity.

Caregiving is offered to both the mother and chick once it hatches. The female will nest in a deep hollow of large trees (they are particularly picky on that subject, more below) at the start of the rainy season and lay between one and three eggs. Unlike other smaller hornbill species, she does not close herself off from the outside world, but the males of the group will keep her fed and protected while she incubates the eggs for just over 40 days. She remains with the newly hatched chick for another month while her bevy of helpers flurries backwards and forwards with tasty snacks for mum and baby.

Though the female almost always lays more than one egg, only one chick will survive more than a few days, with either active or passive siblicide being a common occurrence. The adults will ignore the younger siblings, even when food is abundant, leading researchers to hypothesise that these eggs are simply an “insurance policy” if the first doesn’t hatch.

LONG LIVE THE GROUND-HORNBILL

Southern ground-hornbills (and Abyssinian ground-hornbills) tick many boxes that make a species particularly vulnerable to steep population declines. They are a long-lived species that require high levels of parental care and take years to mature and produce offspring of their own. Even then, only one chick is forthcoming every three years – their reproduction rate is low. This is a similar problem to that experienced in species like rhinos or elephants. However, while those large mammal species have relatively low natural mortality rates, ground-hornbill chicks are exceptionally vulnerable during fledging. (They do, however, have very high natural survival rates once they reach adulthood.)



Ground-hornbills almost exclusively nest in the hollows of large, long-lived tree species. Unfortunately, these are usually the first plant species to disappear due to human encroachment. When a female’s preferred nest site is destroyed, it may take her years to accept a suitable replacement, which can destabilise the breeding groups.

CONSERVING THE GROUND-HORNBILL

Though the Southern ground-hornbill is listed as “vulnerable” by the IUCN Red List, there are several countries within their range where the ground-hornbill is severely threatened. They are endangered in South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland and may soon be critically endangered in South Africa and Lesotho. The populations in Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique also require concerted conservation efforts to keep numbers stable.

The many threats facing them, combined with contrasting cultural perceptions, require multi-pronged approaches from the organisations dedicated to conserving the ground-hornbill. This is accomplished through (among other initiatives) education programmes, the provision of nest boxes, and the protection of remaining habitats. Some projects also remove the second chick from the nest (only the older chick survives under natural conditions) and hand-raise the youngsters. Artificial breeding groups are created before the birds are released back into their former range. This must be done in such a way that the birds do not form an attachment to the human caregivers (through puppets and other methods). The young hornbills must also be given sufficient “helper practice” during the first, crucial developmental stage years.



CONSERVATION

FIRE AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

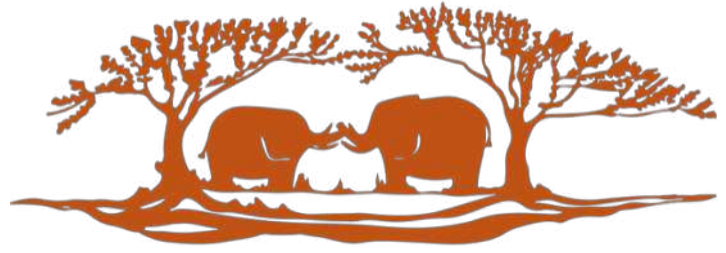
This year we will be starting our block burn on the reserve and I thought it would be a great opportunity to explain how fire can be used as a management tool in our environment. Once we have finalized the burn sites we will update you all. Veld is the single most important asset in any conservation area. Evaluation of veld conditions is undertaken after the growing season, and plans are put forward for preferred burns that will take place during spring. This practice is undertaken by conservationists country-wide. The veld evaluation or assessment typically identifies the suitability of fire as a management tool to benefit a particular area. The benefits of burning are four-fold:



1. We use fire to maintain a representative sample of biodiversity. Fire helps us to maintain a balance between open grass areas and woody thickets. It allows for increased biodiversity because a mixture of grassland and woody areas are important to achieve heterogeneity in the landscape as opposed to a homogenous environment where there is either plain grassland or woody climax vegetation. Therefore, in a mixed landscape, one can expect to see more species diversity of fauna and flora as opposed to a single landscape.
2. The heat intensity of a veld can be manipulated through the use of the ambient conditions which include temperature, moisture and wind speed. For example, hot fires are achieved by burning in warm temperature conditions through midday with warm winds blowing. Under these conditions, the objective of the burn is to raise the intensity of the fire and impact on the woody encroachers that are threatening the biodiversity. The effects are adequate over some time with regular burning and will achieve the objective of retarding woody encroachers. It is also more cost-effective than manual clearing and subsequent follow up foliar sprays on plant coppice.
3. Fire causes the natural cycling of nutrients. Old moribund grasses have nutrients that need to be recycled into the soils. Fire does this and creates new growth vigour. With good rains, this growth contributes towards the next fuel load required for subsequent burning, perhaps after two or three seasons of growth.
4. Herbivores will naturally congregate on newly burned areas that are flushing as the veld is more palatable to them in these areas. In this way, management can manipulate game movement and veld utilization. Areas of over-utilization can be rested. The nutritional value in the flushing veld after a burn is significant to all herbivores, not just the grasses but also the browse components. To many of the seasonal breeders and those species such as zebra and kudu who have a foaling and calving peak in summer, the nutrition assists in the quality of lactation available to the new recruitment.

The absence of substantial fuel loads and relatively low growth vigour is indicative of the absence of regularly planned burns. This is easily reversed through meticulous pre-burn planning, careful execution of burning and post-burn monitoring. It is a worthy challenge that our veld and wildlife will appreciate. Although the veld will always look rather bleak in appearance after a burn, the important consideration is that the African savannah has evolved with fire, maintaining its nutrient cycle and maintaining its biodiversity. Average summer rains will always restore the beauty of the landscape.

REACHING OUT



March has been a very productive one in terms of donations, a wonderful example being four plastic tables, sixteen chairs and sixteen laundry basins (all brand new) which will be used by children when visiting our staff compounds. They will come in very handy, especially with the upgrades of these areas. They were kindly donated by Ayni Marketing in Johannesburg.

We have also received 31 brand new pencil cases filled with stationery for children and 15 pairs of brand new school shoes (Bata Toughes), along with a large bag of beanies and a couple of blankets – ahead of the approaching winter. All these items have been delivered to the Maseke Drop-in Centre, by Terry and Sandy, new managers of ONGR.

Sigagule was the recipient of medical supplies for their clinic. These included 10 plastic wash basins, a digital thermometer, surgical swabs, 30 whiteboard markers and a Nebulising Kit.

If you would like to assist in any way, such as sharing the transportation of donations from Johannesburg to the Reserve or offer any type of contribution you can become part of the ORGR Outreach WhatsApp group by contacting Susan Harwood on 0832282546.

A big thank you goes to all those members who continue to drop off donations in the office and to those who support the Balule Outreach Trust, allowing us to supply much-needed food parcels and offer bursaries to promising young learners at the Southern Cross School and Nourish.



Banking details of the Trust

First National Bank (FNB), Bryanston, South Africa

Account number: 6233 678 7877 Clearing Code: 250-017

Swift number: FIRNZAJJXXX

Please reference EFT payments with your name.

MEMBERS UPDATES

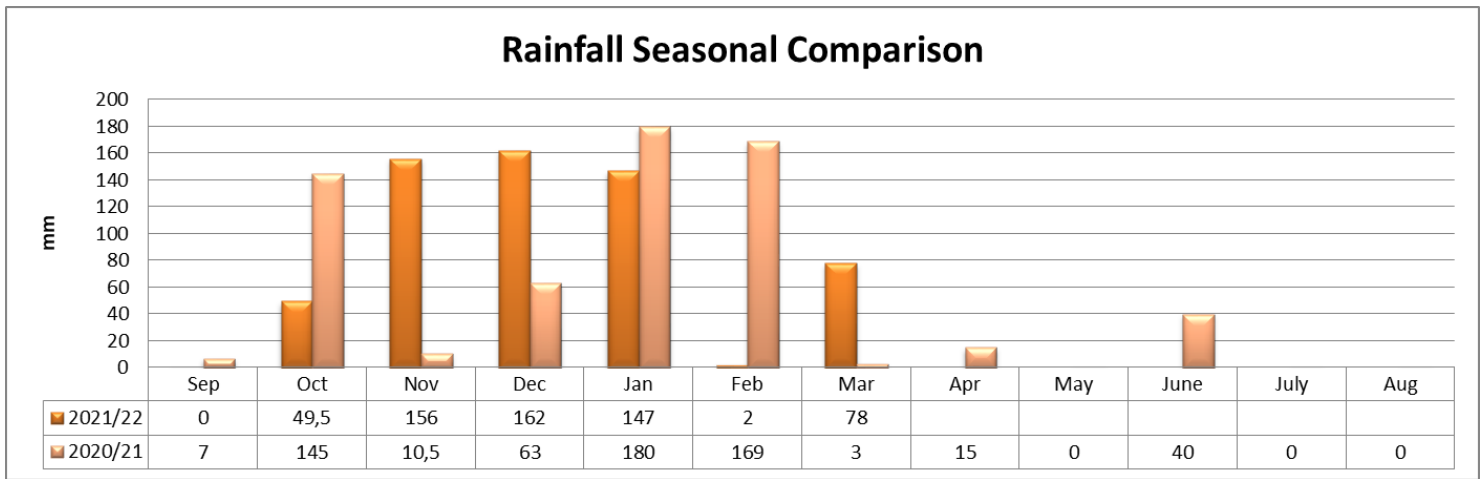
THE WEATHER REPORT

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is currently in a La Niña state, however, forecasts indicate that it will likely return to a neutral state during the coming seasons. During autumn and winter, the presence of ENSO has less of an impact. Thus, the presence of the current La Niña event is not expected to have any significant impact on rainfall in the coming seasons.

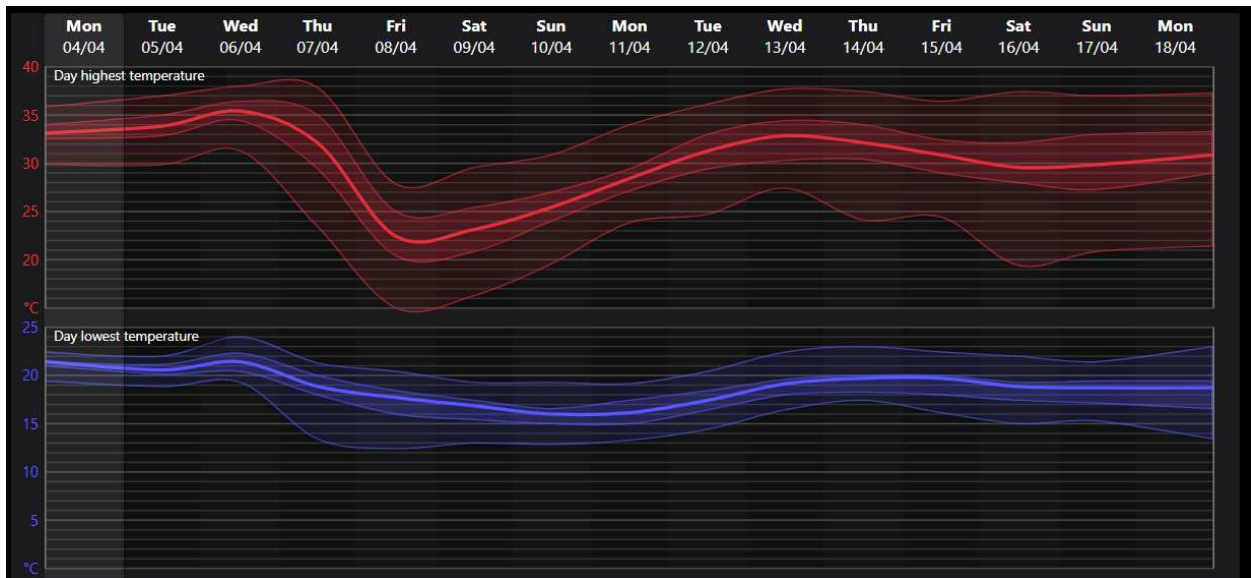


The multi-model rainfall forecast indicates above-normal rainfall for the north-east of the country and below-normal rainfall for the south-west during late autumn (AMJ) through to early winter (MJJ). Temperatures are expected to be above-normal for most of the country, with the exception of minimum temperatures over the southern parts.

We went through a period of 6 weeks during February and March without any rain falling and the bush started drying out very early. We recorded 2mm of rain in February and thankfully the heavens opened up in March and delivered 78mm of rain in two sets of downpours. We have now had a second greening on the reserve and it looks like we will be suitably set up for the upcoming dry season. Our total seasonal rainfall is sitting at 594.5mm, compared to 577.5mm at the same time last year.

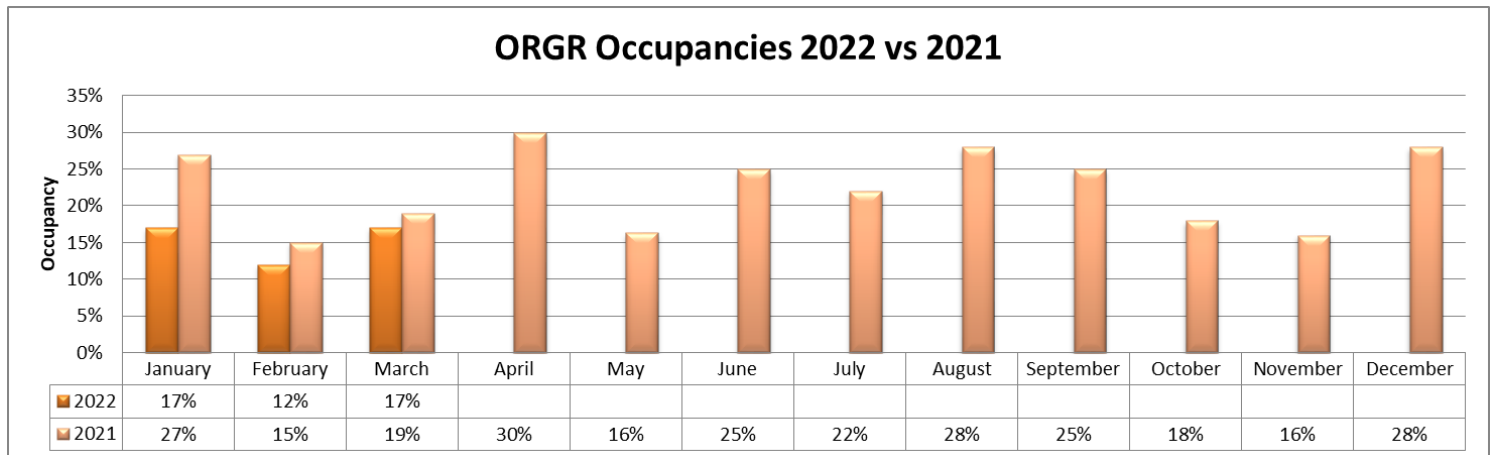


The Temperature forecast for the next 15 days looks to be fairly mild with average daytime temps around 30 degrees.



OCCUPANCIES

February saw an average occupancy of 12%, one of the quietest months ORGR has had in a while. We peaked at 25 units in residence and our quietest day had 6 units in house. March was a little busier with an average occupancy of 17% and the busiest day seeing 26 units in residence. On the quietest, only 11 units were occupied. We are expecting the reserve to be very busy during the upcoming Easter Holidays.



OUR NIGHT SKY IN APRIL

In a nutshell...

Moon

Date	Time	Phase
01/04	08h24	New Moon
09/04	08h47	First Quarter
16/04	20h55	Full Moon
23/04	13h56	Last Quarter
30/04	22h28	New Moon

Sun and Moon

The New Moon occurs on the 1st of April at 08h24. The First Quarter falls on the 9th of April at 08h47 and the Full Moon occurs on the 16th of April at 20h55. The Last Quarter falls on the 23rd of April at 13h56. This month has a second New Moon, which occurs on the 30th of April at 22h28.

The Moon will be at apogee (furthest from Earth) at a distance of about 404 438 km on the 7th of April at 21h10. On the 19th of April, the Moon will be at perigee (closest approach to the Earth) at a distance of about 365 143 km at 17h13.

Planet Visibility

Mercury is not visible this month.

Venus shines as the bright morning star, near Aquarius at the beginning of the month and near Pisces by month end

Mars is visible in the morning sky near the stars of the constellation Capricornus at the beginning of the month and near Aquarius by month end.

Jupiter is visible in the morning sky near Pisces

Saturn is visible in the morning sky and is located 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

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

The Pointers: Alpha and Beta Centauri

ORGR WILD WALKS

Our walking season is almost upon us and we are planning on starting the season in June and run it through to the end of October. The bush is still extremely dense, rendering walks quite challenging and risky. By the end of June, the bush would have thinned out enough to safely conduct walks. We will be offering two a week, i.e. one on a Wednesday and one on a Saturday as set out by the schedule below. Please note that booked walks may be cancelled at the last minute due to operational requirements, should they arise.

ORGR Wild Walks 2022				
June	July	August	September	October
29th	2nd	27th	3rd	19th
	6th	31st	7th	22nd
	9th		10th	26th
	13th		14th	29th
	16th		17th	
	20th			
	23rd			

The base cost of the walk is R1200 for 2 persons, R1800 for 4 persons, R2400 for 6 persons and R3000 for 8 persons (maximum per walk). A non-refundable deposit for the full amount will be due upon making your Wild Walks reservation. Booking will be subject to availability and on a first-come, first-served basis. If a group desires exclusivity on their walk, the maximum charge (for 8 participants) will apply. All income received for the walks will be invested into data for our Anti-Poaching Cameras out in the field.

Its very important to note the following when going on a walk. Please:

- bring enough drinking water
- wear suitable walking shoes and hat.
- bring your own binoculars

Ensure you wear neutral coloured clothing and avoid bright colours and whites.

Times and meeting locations may change and this will be communicated to the group the day before.



SAFE TIPS FOR VIEWING ELEPHANTS

There are currently a large number of elephants on the reserve and the elephant density is rising steadily as the dry season slowly takes over. This is the perfect time for a refresher on how to safely view these incredible beasts on game drives. In general, elephants are gentle giants, great mothers, and animals which enjoy social interaction and even a bit of fun when there's water around. They don't really want to give humans a hard time, but you have to understand how they think.

Despite their enormous size, they can view you and your vehicle as a threat, which makes them jittery and five or six tons of jitters is usually bad for an offending human!

Know that musth bulls can be unpredictable and dangerous. Musth is a state of sexual tension for them and they can be aggressive. You will know one from the fact that he is leaking fluid from the temporal gland between his eyes and ears. He may also be leaking urine onto his hind legs and the ground. Keep a safe distance and don't antagonize him.

Know the signs of aggression and what they mean

- An elephant standing tall with its head and tail raised and ears spread is a warning sign that it is uncomfortable about something - possibly you.
- A rocking motion with one foot swaying back and forth is another hint you shouldn't ignore.
- The elephant may uproot objects and throw them in your direction as a threat.
- If the elephant starts to shake its head, it's getting really annoyed. Tossing its head up and down is also a threat display.
- Swinging the trunk, blowing and trumpeting are also signs the elephant has been disturbed. Sometimes youngsters do this just to test their (and your) mettle! If a full-grown elephant does it, don't ignore it.
- An irritated elephant might mock charge you as a warning - a rapid approach for a few steps with head held high and ears spread. This is giving you a fair warning to back off. If you don't, the next step may be a full charge.



Basic rules for watching elephants

Keep your distance (at least 50m) and stay in your car.

Don't drive off the road.

Don't follow the elephants.

Always give elephants the right of way.

When you come to a sighting, slow down and don't speed into it.

Check for escape routes before you settle down to watch them.

Drive off slowly (in reverse if necessary) if they get too near you. If they come closer than about 20m try to back off but don't panic or make lots of noise by revving your engine. They hate that.

Never cut off their path, especially if there's more than one vehicle at a sighting.

Be wary of breeding herds, especially when they have small calves. Female elephants can become aggressive if they see you as a threat to the safety of their young.

- A full charge isn't something you want to have directed at you or your vehicle. You need to read the earlier signs as above and give way or back off quietly out of the elephant's personal space until it feels calm again. Remember that a charging elephant can move at around 40km/h, much faster than you can reverse.

ACCESS CONTROL

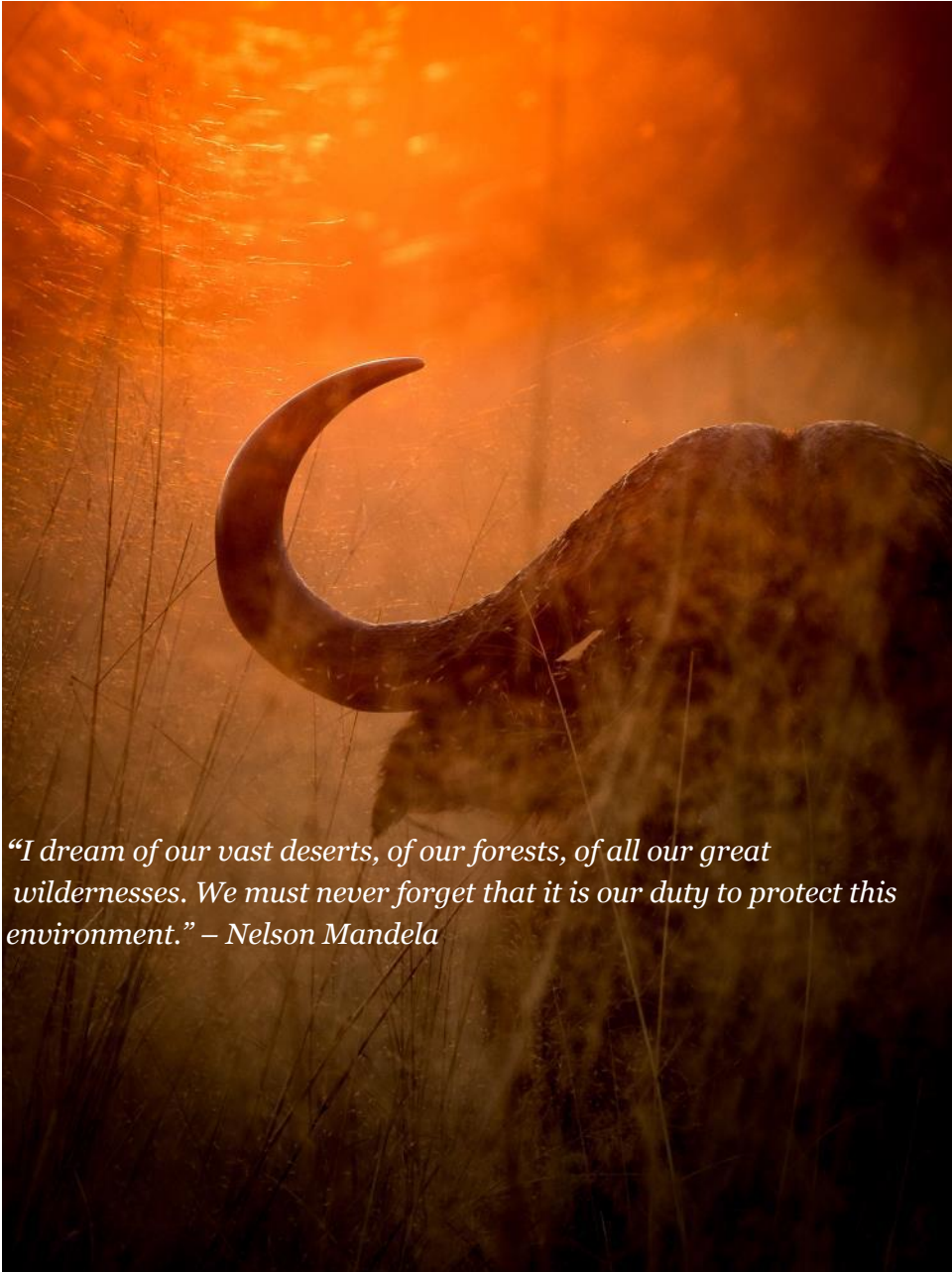
We are upgrading the Access Control System at the Balule Southern Gate soon. The new system will have improved functionality enabling us more control over who has access to Balule via this entry point. This system will link into the Olifants North system and Grietjie Gate system closing that access control loop. The system is App-based and uses QR codes to allow visitors and contractors to access the reserve via a scanner device based at the gate. Each Member and User will be issued with an Access Card which can be used at the gate to gain access. We might need some additional information from Olifants Family to complete the database and will be in touch via a separate communication.

THE FINAL WORD

We wish our Olifants Family wonderful Easter Holidays and for those that are travelling here, be safe and we will catch you on the reserve very soon.

Regards,

Nick and the Olifants Team



“I dream of our vast deserts, of our forests, of all our great wildernesses. We must never forget that it is our duty to protect this environment.” – Nelson Mandela

QUICK SHOUT OUT!!

Thank you to Hannah from Unit 83 for donating two of her old Camera Traps and batteries to us recently. We have deployed these cameras with the Rhino Monitoring Project to assist in keeping track of our precious rhinos. From the whole team, thanks a million!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Night Sky – SAAO
Ground Hornbills – Africa Geographic
Tips for viewing Elephants – Roxanne Reid
(www.roxannereid.co.za)