



NEWSLETTER

June 2023 Issue

Quick Banded Mongoose Facts

Social Creatures: Banded mongooses are highly social animals and live in large family groups called "packs" or "gangs" that can consist of up to 40 individuals.

Cooperative Breeding: In banded mongoose packs, only the dominant female and male breed, while the other members of the group help with rearing the young.

Complex Vocalizations: They have a wide repertoire of vocalizations, including purring, growling, and high-pitched squeaking. They use these vocalizations to communicate and coordinate group activities.

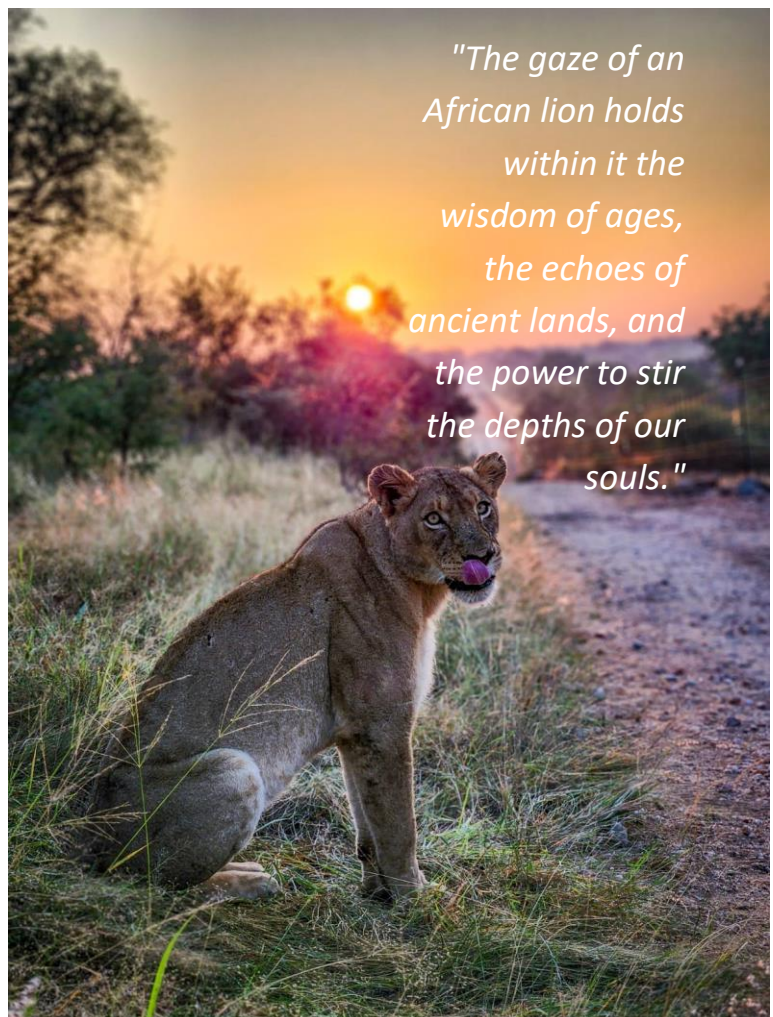
Fearless Hunters: They are skilled hunters and primarily feed on insects, small reptiles, and rodents. They are known for their fearlessness and have been observed taking on venomous snakes like cobras.

Shared Parenting: Members of the share parental responsibilities. They take turns guarding the young, feeding them, and even grooming them.

Synchronized Breeding: The dominant female controls the breeding cycle of the group. She synchronizes the breeding so that all females give birth within a few days of each other, ensuring collective care for the offspring.

DEAR OLIFANTS FAMILY

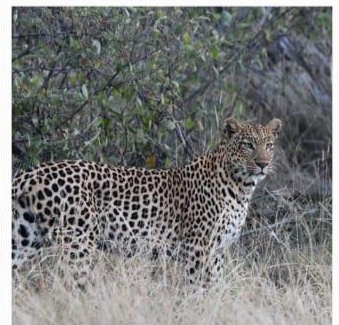
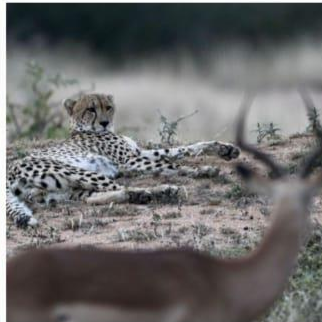
Welcome to the mid-year edition of the Olifants River Game Reserve Newsletter, where we embark on an enchanting journey through the captivating winter season in the bushveld. As the temperature drops and nature embraces a serene stillness, our beloved reserve unveils a tapestry of remarkable sights and experiences. From the gentle rustling of dry leaves to the magnificent wildlife encounters, join us as we delve into the heart of this magical time of year. I hope you enjoy the June edition of the Olifants Newsletter. Happy Reading!



"The gaze of an African lion holds within it the wisdom of ages, the echoes of ancient lands, and the power to stir the depths of our souls."

ORGR GAME DRIVE

The game viewing has been out of this world recently. Cheetahs have returned to the reserve, providing us with some incredible sightings over several days. Wild dogs have also been spotted fairly frequently. Three separate lions prides have been sighted on the reserve in recent months with activity of these big cats still very high in our area. General game numbers are very good with great sightings of giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, warthog, waterbuck and nyala. Buffaloes have also been seen often with herds moving through the area and resident Dagga boys hanging out in the drainage lines and water holes. Thank you to those who submitted photos...please keep posting those sightings on the Telegram group!



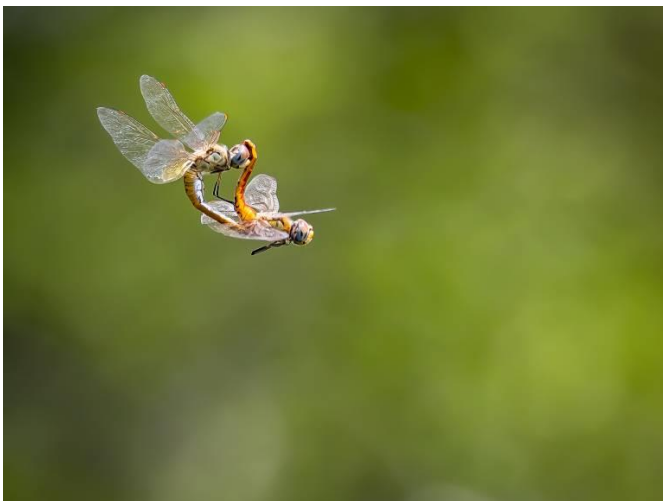
FEATURE ARTICLE: A SECOND SILENT SPRING – THE IMPENDING INSECT APOCALYPSE

Insects may not be the “poster child” for climate change, but they are one of the animal groups most vulnerable to changing temperatures and weather systems. They also provide several fundamental and essential ecosystem services. Now, a team of over 70 scientists from across 19 countries are warning that unless action is taken, “we will drastically reduce our ability to build a sustainable future based on healthy, functional ecosystems”.



The authors examined hundreds of peer-reviewed studies from across the globe, predominantly from the past two decades. Their review provides a comprehensive, one-stop summary of every vital piece of research relating to insects and the threats they face. Scientists have been aware of declining insect species for decades, with some even labelling it an “insect apocalypse”, but viewed as a whole, the review of new research suggests a bleak picture. Both the short- and long-term effects of climate change have the potential to profoundly affect insect thermoregulation, breeding habits and distribution.

The ecological roles and services provided by insects should not be underestimated, and quite apart from a potential loss of biodiversity, their absence will severely impact human life. These services include pollination(including many crop plants), recycling nutrients, and providing an important food source for animals further up the food chain. On the opposite end of the spectrum, some insect families are pests and parasites, destroying livelihoods and spreading disease. Healthy ecosystems and the presence of other competing insects help to keep these damage-causing insects in check.



Most insects cannot internally thermoregulate as mammals and birds can, meaning their response to changing temperatures is primarily behavioural(shade-seeking, for example). As a consequence, they are particularly vulnerable to extreme temperatures. To survive extreme weather events and cycles, some insects may be forced to shift their distribution, while others may face catastrophic disruptions to their breeding cycles. A loss of genetic diversity, sterility and even extinction could follow. In some instances, species (especially those in the tropics) may vanish before they have even been discovered.

The impacts of climate change on insects can be divided into the short-term and long-term. Short-term effects of climate change include heat waves and extreme

temperatures, increased frequency of extreme temperatures, drought, rainfall and floods, and fire. The long-term effects may be more gradual and subtle but could be equally damaging. These include effects on species distributions, phenology (the seasonal patterns of reproduction, growth, and migration, for example) and the relationships between species. One study suggested that the ranges of nearly half the world's insect species will decline by 50% if average global temperatures rise by 3.2°C. Conversely, the range of malaria-carrying mosquitoes could expand.

While the authors acknowledge that insect declines can also be attributed to habitat loss and fragmentation, along with many other anthropogenic factors, they emphasise that the aforementioned effects of climate change could exacerbate many of these challenges and even tip endangered populations towards extinction. The knock-on effects will be felt across trophic levels.

With limited exceptions, insects are not particularly iconic animals. The plights of the polar bears and melting ice caps or starving elephants in drought-stricken Africa make for much more emotive climate-change symbolism. Yet the impact of climate change on insects has the potential to be both immediate and long-lived and will have tragic consequences for both ecosystems and people.

“We need to realise, as humans, that we are one species out of millions of species, and there's no reason for us to assume that we're never going to go extinct,” says Anahí Espíndola, one of the co-authors and assistant professor of entomology at the University of Maryland. “These changes to insects can affect our species in pretty drastic ways.”



CONSERVATION

RHINO DOWN

Balule sadly lost two White rhinos in April. The team at MRNR (South of ORGR) discovered extreme vulture activity in the area east of the old sliding gate. History has taught us that this activity needs to be investigated as it is one of the first signs of a carcass. The team followed the birds and sadly they found the carcasses of two White rhinos - a mother and her 13-month-old calf - with their horns removed. The reaction team of ORGR, York, MRNR, and SAPS ESU were summoned to the scene. It was only last October that we had a celebratory drink at Sunset Plains for 730 days (2 years) with no loss. BNR reached 1089 days without a loss. Although this is a great achievement, for which we must be proud of, it fades into insignificance when the reality of these crimes returns to our landscape. However much it hurts, we cannot give up and we will do everything in our power to bring the perpetrators to book. This goes to show that we cannot let our guard down and we have to remain vigilant at all times.



BALULE FOLLOW-UP DEHORNING

Balule Nature Reserve has completed a follow-up dehorning operation during the first week of May which dehorned all of the rhino population on the reserve, ensuring our animals present as little interest to poachers as possible. The operation was a huge success with great collaboration between the BNR team, vets and pilots. A short video of the dehorning operation can be seen by following this link: <https://youtu.be/r5EFFDUXETE>



VELD CONDITION

The veld is in excellent condition due to the massive rains received in February. The grasses are slowly starting to dry out but the vegetation is still very dense. We are planning on continuing our controlled burn program and will assess the condition mid-year for planning.

WILD DOG EUTHANASIA

We have had to euthanise a Wild dog recently close to Big Dam. The individual was lame on his hind quarters and initially, we believed he was hit by a vehicle. The post-mortem indicated that there was in fact no trauma to the canine but rather a chronic illness which caused the paralysis, possibly linked to TB where an abscess could have grown on the spine and damaged the nervous system. Further samples were taken and sent for analysis as EWT were interested in digging a little deeper into the cause of this debilitating condition.

POM POM LEAVES US

The old Pompom female was finally taken out by the Mashatu pride recently. She was in very poor condition and her time was definitely up. She was discovered by members on Office Road, still half alive after an initial attack. The responsible lions were still hovering around. It was decided to close the sighting and let nature take its course. The next morning we found her dead in the road and we moved the carcass into the bush for decomposition. She was an iconic presence in our area with many members having fond memories and sightings of her over a period spanning at least 12 years.



APNR PREDATOR BOMA



The ANPR predator boma that was constructed along our southern cutline has been completed and will be operational very soon. As mentioned in the previous newsletter, this facility will house predators requiring rehabilitation or relocation in all APNR reserves. **Important to note that this area is out of bounds for members,** so please do not drive down the access road off the southern cutline. The only time you may access this facility is when you are invited to do so by the Warden. The boma will be accommodating injured predators and it could be dangerous to the animals and yourself to access this facility without the proper company.

BALULE NATURE RESERVE REBRANDING

Balule Nature Reserve is very proud to present its new branding – an updated, stylized version of the buffalo, after which the region is named. The reserve uses a buffalo as its logo because when Balule was originally formed and the fences came down, the landowners in Balule were excited for the Big Five to start moving into the newly formed reserve. Some of the first animals that crossed were 16 buffalos, the problem was that back then, the red veterinary line ran through Balule along the Railway line road and the Nature Conservation department was instructed to destroy the herd. Balule and its landowners fought hard to ensure this did not happen and managed to move the red line back to the R40 thus protecting the herd. The buffalo has been a symbol of Balule's conservation efforts ever since!



BALULE
NATURE RESERVE

The Balule Outreach Trust's new logo (featured for this first time in this newsletter) is perfectly aligned with the new Balule branding. A logo redesign/update reveals to the world that we are evolving and adapting to the modern world and therefore strengthens our image for a more impactful presence in the region. Huge thanks goes to Gary Harwood and branding specialists, the HKLM Branding, for their pro bono efforts in creating the new branding.

REACHING OUT

The can-do attitude and collective generosity of our community brings the Ubuntu spirit to life - and as always, we witnessed this blessing in motion again this past month.



During May, John Anderson and Susan Harwood of Balule Outreach Trust (BOT) were joined by Robyn Reid of ONGR for a visit to the Drop-In Centre in Maseke to check up how things are going there. They were accompanied by an Australian film crew who have been filming various aspects of Balule for a three-part documentary for Netflix.

BOT provides the centre with monthly food parcels for the 200 children (comprising mostly orphans) who visit the venue daily for their lunchtime meal and homework/after-school care assistance. As a token gift for the eight helpers at the Drop-In Centre, each lady received a new handbag filled with nice-to-have items including a notepad & pen, toiletries, a chocolate snack and a beanie. Seventy-five handmade beanies and 40 filled pencil cases were also donated, all by Bags of Love.

It was noted that there were only three plastic tumblers available for all the children to share when water rations (delivered weekly) were provided for them in a bucket after lunch. An extremely generous member of our ORGR WhatsApp Outreach group has ordered and paid for 200 new plastic tumblers which will be taken to Maseke soon. The other items urgently required for the Maseke children are cutlery sets. They eat their pap and beans using their hands but eating rice is an extremely challenging task without spoons! Is there anyone out there who can assist?



The BOT members were notified by the manager of the centre that the borehole has stopped working and they have been out of water for months, so growing vegetables on their premises has come to a halt and both cooking and ablution facilities severely impacted. BOT is arranging a quote for the work involved in restoring the water supplies to the centre as a matter of urgency.



We thank all the members who willingly contribute to the Outreach Trust and to those who provide donations for ORGR staff and their children, as well as the surrounding communities. If you would like to be kept abreast of outreach matters, please contact Susan Harwood on 0832282546 to join the WhatsApp group. If you would like to contribute to the Balule Outreach Trust, please use the banking details below, using your surname as the reference and send a POP to John Anderson via email (john@afgen.co.za) to receive an 18A tax certificate.

Banking details of the BALULE OUTREACH 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.

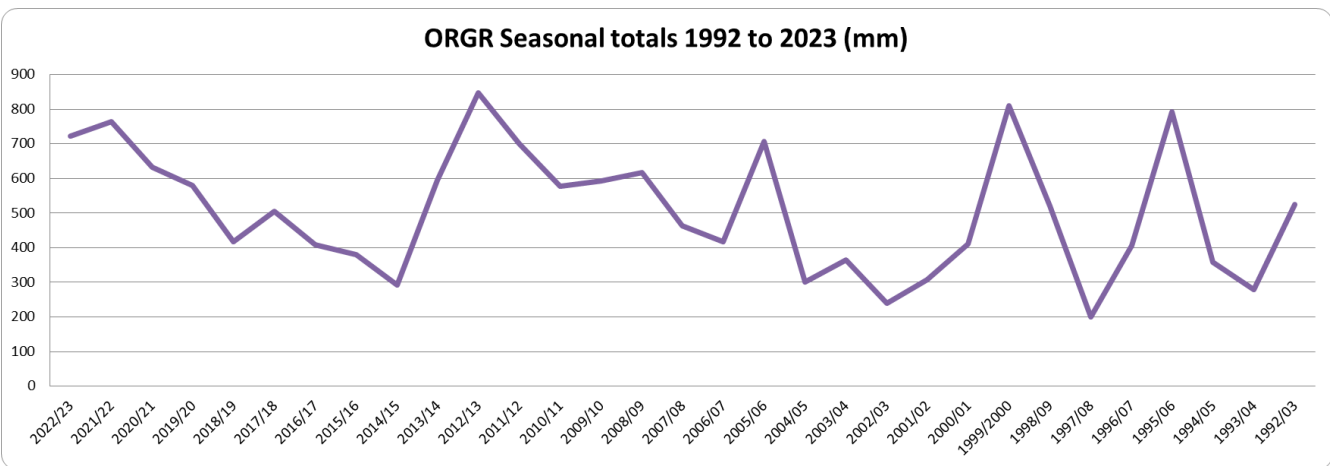
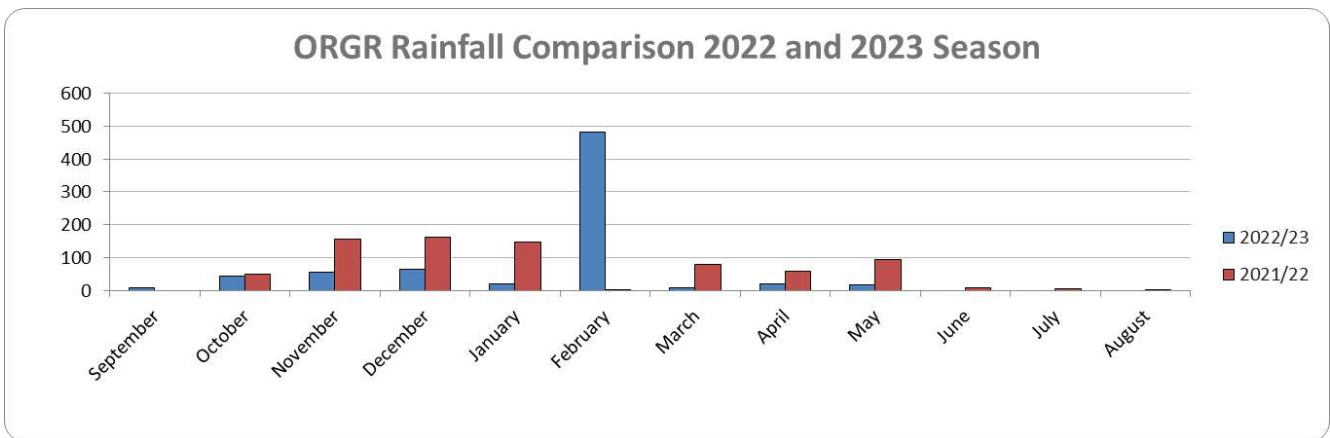
MEMBERS UPDATES

THE WEATHER REPORT

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is currently in a Neutral state, and forecasts indicate that it will likely move into a weak El Niño state during late-winter and early-spring and eventually strengthen into a strong El Niño state for the remainder of the summer season. Caution is advised though, ENSO predictions during this time are less skilful than other times of the year. It is advised that the ENSO forecasts be monitored from now until we reach August/September when ENSO forecasts have significantly higher skill levels. ENSO's impact is limited for the current forecast period until the summer season starts which will likely be impacted by a strong El Niño state if early predictions are correct.



April produced 20,04 mm of rain and May 17,76 mm bringing our seasonal total to 722,70 mm.

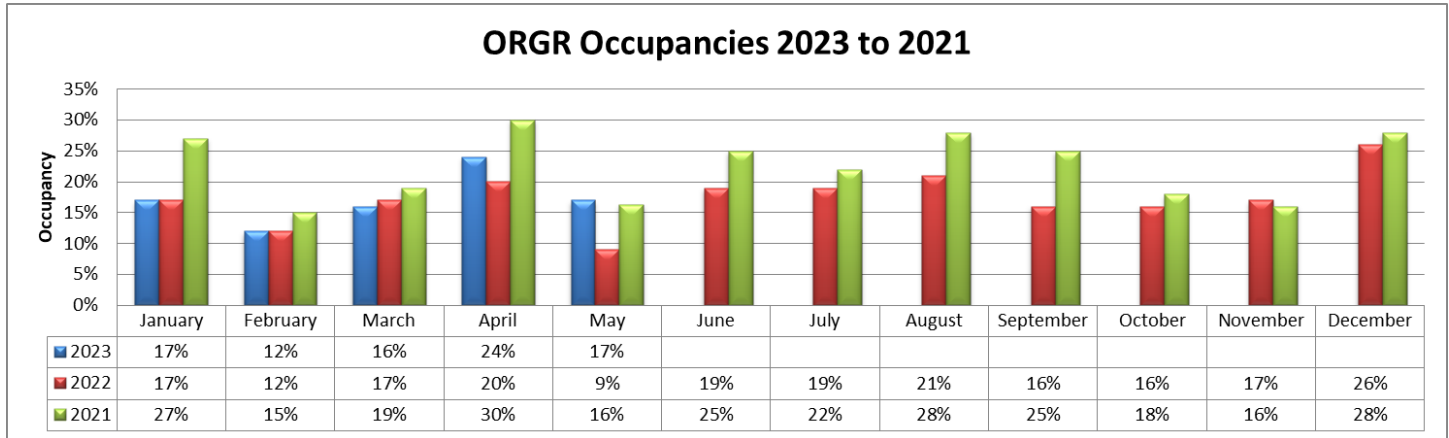


April 2023 Weather Summary - ORGR	High	Low	Average	May 2023 Weather Summary - ORGR	High	Low	Average
Temperature	37.1 °C	12.2 °C	23.8 °C	Temperature	34.2 °C	10.0 °C	21.4 °C
Dew Point	20.6 °C	8.5 °C	15.6 °C	Dew Point	18.8 °C	6.8 °C	14.3 °C
Humidity	92 %	20 %	63 %	Humidity	91 %	23 %	66 %
Precipitation	20.04 mm	--	--	Precipitation	17.79 mm	--	--
Wind Speed	27.4 km/h	0.0 km/h	4.4 km/h	Wind Speed	22.9 km/h	0.0 km/h	4.2 km/h
Wind Gust	41.0 km/h	--	6.7 km/h	Wind Gust	32.0 km/h	--	6.2 km/h
Wind Direction	--	--	South	Wind Direction	--	--	SSW
Pressure	1,016.15 hPa	998.88 hPa		Pressure	1,014.77 hPa	1,002.61 hPa	--

OCCUPANCIES

April saw an average of 24 units in residence with May showing 17% of the units being occupied. We saw a peak of 37 units on the reserve for the last 4 days in April during the long weekend.

Average Occupancies	
2023	17%
2022	17%
2021	22%
2020	22%
2019	14%

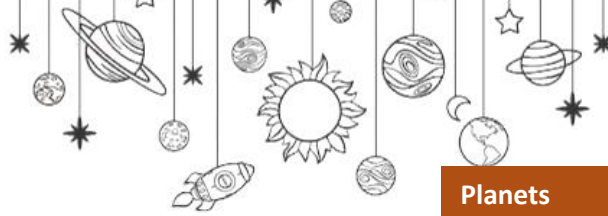


GAME VIEWING PROTOCOLS

We need to revisit the game viewing protocols from time to time to ensure we are all on the same page. These protocols are designed to make sure that our wildlife is put under as little pressure as possible and that all of our reserve users get the best experience when out on game drive. Members are ultimately responsible for compliance with the regulations by themselves and their guests and should make certain that the appropriate procedures are in place at their units to ensure awareness of and compliance with the rules and regulations of our reserves. Below are just a few reminders. Please visit the website for the full documents.

1. Please remember that Wild dog and cheetah may not be viewed using a spotlight at night. These are diurnal predators and should not be disturbed after sunset.
2. Do not shine spotlights at other vehicles, people or lodges. While at a sighting, the use of red filters is encouraged and be conscious of where you point your spotlights.
3. The driver of the first vehicle at a sighting takes control of the sighting. When approaching another vehicle, slow down and, after dark, turn off spotlights and switch headlights to park lights. Permission to enter the sighting should be requested when approaching the sighting. Not more than four vehicles should be at a sighting unless less restrictive or open terrain suggests otherwise. While no rules are established to govern this behaviour, sensible management of numbers should be left to the discretion of the person in control. If the person controlling the sighting refuses an approach to a sighting, the requesting vehicle should stay out of sight until invited to join. Vehicles should not be parked in, and a clear escape route must always be available to all vehicles. Consider others by leaving the sighting after a reasonable time, allowing others the opportunity to approach.

OUR NIGHT SKY IN JUNE



Constellations

It's cold outside but arguably the best time of year to enjoy stunning views of the river in the sky, the Milky Way on a moonless night away from the lights of towns and cities. Over thousands of years the sky has been mapped into suburbs or constellations. They are groups of stars that have been given a name and more recently a border. They have been used as tools to share significant cultural stories, events and as markers. Today, the 88 western constellations used here help astronomers map the sky and search for astronomical objects. In June these constellations dominate the sky:

Leo – the lion, in the northwest. The brightest part looks more like an upside-down question mark, as seen in the southern hemisphere, than a lion from the north. Its brightest star Regulus (Little King) is a system of four tightly bound stars at 79 light years. It was once referred to as one of the four Royal Stars, or guardians of the heavens because of its proximity to the point in the sky that marked the northern Summer Solstice as seen by Persian astronomers ~5,000 years ago. Precession of the equinoxes has now moved this point to Cancer the crab.

Virgo – the maiden, high overhead is the second largest constellation in the sky and one of the two in which the ecliptic and celestial equator cross. This one marks the current position of the September equinox, the beginning of our southern Spring. It is home to a cluster of galaxies, of which M87 is the largest, at around 60 million light years with a central black hole at least 7 billion times the mass of the Sun. Virgo has one bright star, the 16th brightest in the night sky called Spica which is about 250 light years away. Like most stars, it is a binary. The brighter of the two being about 7 times the diameter of the Sun and 10 times more massive. Its hot surface temperature of around 20,000 kelvin makes it blue white in colour.

Scorpius – high in the eastern sky, is one of the brightest and most easily identifiable constellations with its hooked tail, heart represented by the red supergiant star Antares and three stars of the head and claws. In Greek Mythology, the scorpion plays a role in many myths, however it is best known for its pursuit of Orion through the night sky.

Sagittarius – also known as the archer, can be found 15 degrees, one outstretched hand span, to the east of Scorpius's stinger. Sagittarius is home, as we see it, to the centre of our galaxy, the Milky Way with a monstrous black hole about four million times the mass of the Sun and 26,000 light years away. It is called Sagittarius A * (pronounced as Sagittarius-A-Star). Images taken in 2017 but released in May 2022 from NASA's Event Horizon Telescope (EHT), show matter swirling around it at close to the speed of light. The event horizon is about the same distance from the singularity as Mercury is from our Sun.

Crux – the Southern Cross, the smallest constellation and its pointers of Alpha and Beta Centauri are high in the south in the early evening. To find south, draw an imaginary line from the top of Crux through the bottom and across the sky. Midway between the Pointers draw a line perpendicular to the line that joins them. Where these two long lines intersect is close to the southern celestial pole. From this point drop to the horizon for south. This technique works at any time of the night, anytime of the year.

Planets

Venus and Mars are the only planets visible in the evenings in June.

Venus is in the northwest after sunset starting in Gemini before wandering into Cancer with Mars and then into Leo at the end of the month. In the early evening of 22 June, the young crescent Moon is below and to the right or north of Venus. Mars is just above the Moon.

Mars is also in the northwest moving from Cancer into Leo in the last week of the month. Mars is very faint at magnitude 1.66 making it 26 times fainter than it was last December at Opposition. It will not be bright again until the next opposition in January 2025.

The morning sky hosts Mercury, Jupiter and Saturn.

Mercury is very low in the northeast ahead of sunrise. It will be in Aries for the first week before moving into Taurus. On 16 June the crescent Moon will be above and to the left. Mercury will drift eastward and become lost in twilight by the end of the third week.

Jupiter too is in Aires above Mercury. On 14 June the waning crescent Moon will be above and to the left of Jupiter. A small telescope should be able to resolve 4 large Moons and two equatorial belts.

ORGR WILD WALKS

Our walking season is almost upon us and we are planning on starting the season at the end of June and running it through to the end of October. We will be offering two walks a week, set out by the schedule below as and when Callan and Nic are available. Please note that booked walks may be cancelled at the last minute due to operational requirements should they arise.

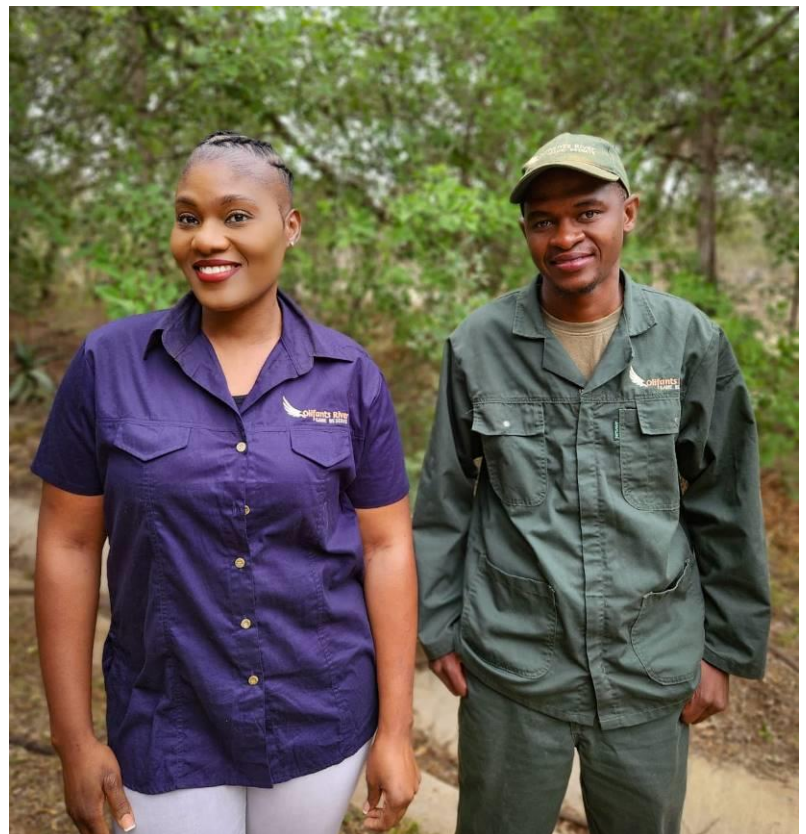
ORGR Wild Walks 2023				
June	July	August	September	October
20th	25th	1st	19th	3rd
23rd	28th	4th	22nd	6th
		8th	26th	10th
		11th	29th	13th
		15th		
		18th		

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 of 8 people per walk). A non-refundable deposit for the full amount will be due upon making your Wild Walks reservations, and booking will be subject to availability and on a first-come first-served basis. If a group desires exclusivity on their walk then they will be charged for a maximum of 8 participants. All income received for the walks will be invested into data for our Anti-poaching cameras out in the field.

WELCOME TO THE HERD

We would like to welcome two new members to the Olifants Herd! Fortunate and Bogani have recently joined the team at ORGR. Fortunate has taken up position in the front office and Bongani in the technical crew.

Fortunate comes with a wealth of experience in the hospitality industry and is well-suited for her role in reception. Bongani is a qualified electrician with excellent technical abilities and is a great all-rounder. Both have settled into their new roles very well. Give them a shout-out when you see them on the reserve and get to know the new herd members! Welcome Fortunate and Bongani.



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

Please bring enough drinking water

Please wear suitable walking shoes

Please bring your own Binoculars

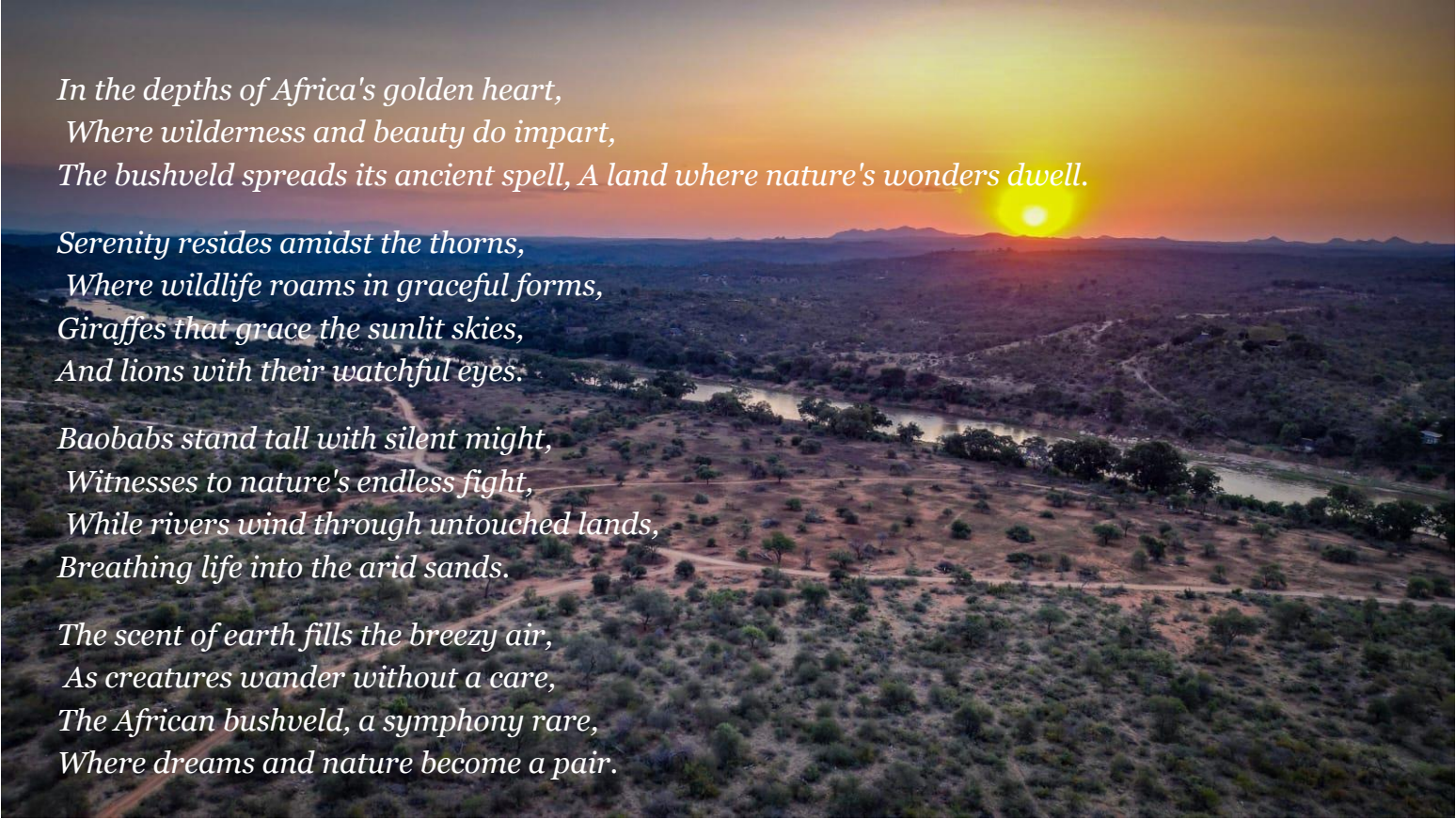
Ensure you wear neutral coloured clothing and avoid bright colours and whites.

We suggest wearing a hat to protect you from the sun.

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

THE FINAL WORD

I hope you have enjoyed the meander through this newsletter. We are looking forward to seeing you all on the reserve soon. I leave you with this wonderful Poem by C. Louise Leipoldt, whose words capture the essence and allure of the African bushveld, painting a vivid picture of its diverse landscapes and the harmony found within its untamed beauty:



*In the depths of Africa's golden heart,
Where wilderness and beauty do impart,
The bushveld spreads its ancient spell, A land where nature's wonders dwell.*

*Serenity resides amidst the thorns,
Where wildlife roams in graceful forms,
Giraffes that grace the sunlit skies,
And lions with their watchful eyes.*

*Baobabs stand tall with silent might,
Witnesses to nature's endless fight,
While rivers wind through untouched lands,
Breathing life into the arid sands.*

*The scent of earth fills the breezy air,
As creatures wander without a care,
The African bushveld, a symphony rare,
Where dreams and nature become a pair.*

Warmest regards!

Nick and the Olifants River Game Reserve Team!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Night Sky – Powerhouse

Insect Story – Africa Geographic