



# NEWSLETTER

October 2023 Issue

## Quick facts: Sausage Tree

**Scientific Name:** The sausage tree is scientifically known as *Kigelia africana* and is a species of flowering plant.

**Distribution:** It is native to sub-Saharan Africa and can be found in many African countries.

**Distinct Fruit:** The tree is most famous for its large, sausage-shaped fruits that can grow up to 65cm long and weigh as much as 7kg.

**Common Name:** The tree gets its name from the distinctive shape of its fruits, which resemble large sausages.

**Traditional Uses:** Various parts of the tree, including the fruit and bark, have been used in traditional African medicine for their medicinal properties.

**Wildlife Attraction:** The sausage tree is a magnet for wildlife, particularly elephants, baboons, and various bird species, which feed on its fruits.

**Flowering at Night:** The tree's large, maroon or reddish-brown flowers open at night and are pollinated by bats and moths.

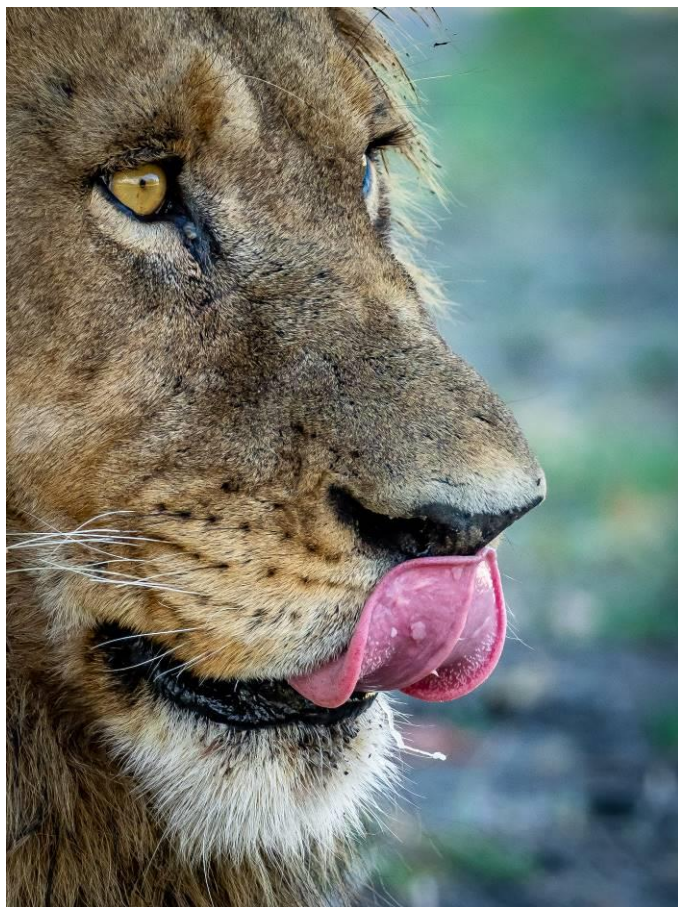
**Cultural Significance:** In some African cultures, parts of the sausage tree are believed to have mystical or spiritual properties, and the tree is often associated with folklore and traditional rituals.

**Medicinal Properties:** The fruit pulp and other parts of the tree have been used in traditional medicine for treating various ailments, such as skin conditions, fungal infections, and stomach issues.

**Conservation Status:** While not endangered, the sausage tree is a valuable species in its ecosystems, and its conservation is important for the overall health of African habitats.

## DEAR OLIFANTS FAMILY

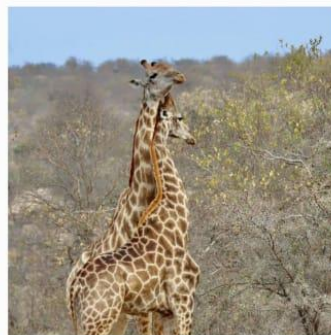
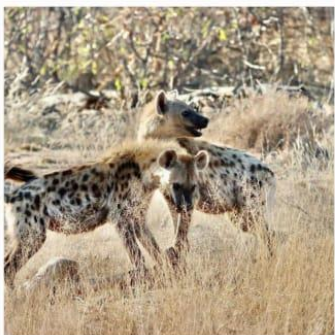
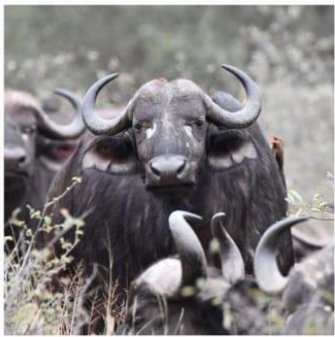
As we embrace the arrival of October, it brings us great joy to share with you the wonderful news that the first rains of the season have graced our beloved reserve, signalling the enchanting transition into Spring. The parched earth has been rejuvenated, and the entire landscape is awash with the first signs of vibrant greenery and the sweet scent of blossoms in the air. It is a time of transformation and renewal, and we are excited to embark on this journey alongside Mother Nature herself. In this month's newsletter, we will delve into the magic that this changing season brings to the Olifants River Game Reserve and how it promises to enhance your experiences here in ways that are nothing short of extraordinary.



*"Amidst the untamed savannah, where the golden sun kisses the earth, lions roam as living embodiments of majestic grace, reminding us of the untethered beauty and fierce resilience of the wild."*

## ORGR GAME DRIVE

The game viewing experience at Olifants River Game Reserve has been nothing short of exceptional this season. Our members have had the privilege of witnessing numerous thrilling moments in the wild. The herds of buffalo have been a spectacular sight, a testament to the thriving ecosystem. In an awe-inspiring twist of nature, two separate lion kills of giraffes were observed, showcasing the raw power and primal drama of life on the savannah. Beyond these remarkable events, the reserve has been teeming with general game, including sporadic sightings of wild dogs that always stir excitement among our members. The elephant population remains robust, offering countless opportunities to marvel at these gentle giants. Regular leopard sightings have delighted those seeking the elusive big cat, and a sighting of a Martial eagle chick on a nest added an extra layer of wonder to our wildlife encounters. Olifants River Game Reserve continues to be a sanctuary where the beauty of the natural world unfolds before our very eyes.

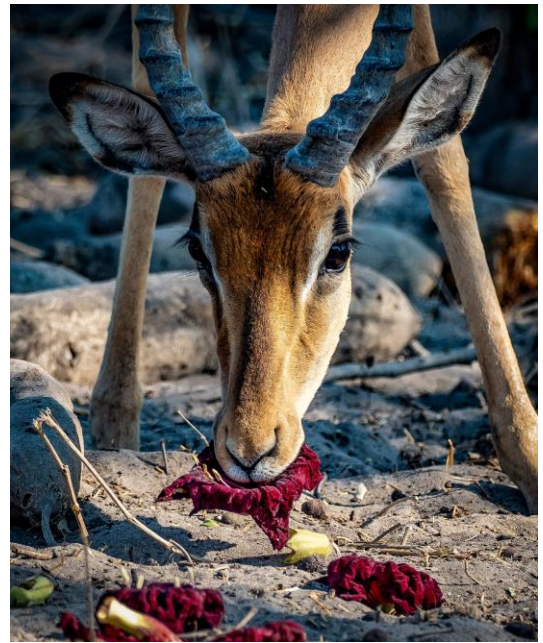


## FEATURE ARTICLE: IMPALA

Ask any safari guide or returning guest about their favourite animal in Africa. The answer is invariably one of the more “charismatic” creatures – lions, leopards, giraffes, elephants and so on. The chances of their saying “impala” are small. Ubiquitous as impala are, these elegant antelope are generally overlooked by all but the most enthusiastic of nature lovers. Yet viewed through appreciative eyes, the impala is one of the most remarkable animals in the African bushveld: doe-eyed, resilient and effortlessly athletic.

### IMPALA BASICS

In his seminal book on the behaviour of African mammals, celebrated ecologist Dr Richard Estes describes the impala (*Aepyceros melampus*) as “the perfect antelope”. Though he does not explain his reasons for this sentiment, it isn’t difficult to understand his thought process. Impalas are widespread and abundant throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa and are easily one of the most common antelope species. Moreover, the impala hit upon the perfect recipe early in its evolutionary history. Research shows they have remained relatively unchanged for at least five million years.



While previously believed to be a sister taxon to the hartebeest family, genetic studies have revealed that the impala’s closest relative is the diminutive suni (*Neotragus moschatus*). However, the impala is the only member of its genus and is the sole member of the Aepycerotini (“high horned”) tribe. Though there is only one recognised species of impala, the black-faced impala (*A. m. petersi*) of Namibia and Angola is listed as a valid subspecies on the IUCN Red List

.One explanation for their early evolutionary success is the impala’s unfussy approach to sustenance. They are mixed feeders, meaning they will graze, browse, and switch between feeding modes depending on the season. They focus on grasses during the early rainy season, when the grass species are green and still growing, before slowly switching to browsing foliage, shoots and forbs as the dry season progresses. This flexibility in feeding is also seen in different habitats. It confers an unusually abundant and reliable food supply and ensures that the impala ewes generally have sufficient sustenance to produce a lamby early.

An impressive production of new lambs each year is essential, as impalas are a staple prey species for all large predators (including martial eagles and other birds of prey). Mortalities are high year-round, but especially during lambing. Therefore, it is somewhat unsurprising that impalas are alert and observant antelope. Their keen eyes are usually the first to pick out the creeping outline of a stalking leopard or cheetah. If a predator is spotted, the herd will let out a cacophony of sharp barks – unless the predator is a pack of painted wolves, in which case the herd may scatter without so much as a sound. However, research has shown that impalas tend to adopt a “better safe than sorry” approach and may be so jumpy that they give off a false alarm call. Consequently, other animals take the warning vocalisations of impalas less seriously.

### IN LEAPS AND BOUNDS

The spring-loaded impalas are undoubtedly one of the most impressive athletes in the animal kingdom, capable of leaping over three metres into the air and covering ten metres in a single bound. They are also

exceptionally fleet of foot, capable of reaching top speeds of over 90km/hour. When running from predators, a herd of impalas will explode into a series of spectacular leaps in every direction, cutting in front of each other or jumping over other individuals in a way that makes it more difficult for the attacker to select a target.

These impressive physical displays are poetry in motion and a pleasure to watch, but even the impala seem to enjoy their abilities at times. On cooler mornings, individuals break out into a unique jumping style where the hindlegs are thrown upwards into a “handstand” before rebounding and leaping upwards again. This rocking high jump is still not fully understood and seems infectious – once one goes, many others follow. While impossible to prove, anyone who has ever witnessed impalas bounding about like this would be hard-pressed to deny that they – adults and youngsters alike – seem to be having fun.

### COLOURS, CONTOURS AND CLEANLINESS

The rufous two-tone coats of the impalas are another distinguishing feature, with the dark fawn-coloured top half contrasting with tan flanks and a white underbelly. This is theorised to be an example of countershading in nature, breaking the pattern of light and shade of a three-dimensional animal. The idea is that the darker dorsal colouration helps disguise ventral shadowing when lit



from above and hides the shape of the impala from potential predators. The flank stripe may also visually amplify the vertical leaps of fleeing impalas, making them seem even more impressive and thus deter predators. Interesting but so far unexplained is the astonishing similarity in the colouration of the impalas and the gerenuk– two antelope with no close phylogenetic relationship.

The dark line markings on either side and through the middle of the impala’s tail are likely signalling devices, particularly during a chase. When impalas are running from a threat or displaying stotting (showing off ) behaviour, the tail is also raised to expose the fluffy underside, which may help individuals stay together as a group. The black metatarsal glands on the back legs – found only on the impala – are also believed to serve a similar function by releasing pheromones during high stress. Of all antelopes, impalas are perhaps the most meticulous about grooming. They are also one of the few that engage in both self- and allogrooming (where one individual grooms the other). The loose teeth of the front lower jaw form a functional toothcomb that helps to remove ectoparasites.

### A ROARING GOOD TIME

Impala social structures and spatial arrangements vary depending on region and seasonality. In Southern Africa, impalas have a strict breeding season that begins during the dry season and lasts only about a month. This seasonality is governed by decreasing day length. During the rut, the males’ androgen levels increase dramatically, and the physiological effects manifest as a thickening of the neck and enlargement of the testicles. During this time, mature rams are territorial, defending their patch from interloping males and working overtime to keep females herded around them. The impalas of East Africa (which are much larger) often have a

more extended breeding season that may last for most of the year. Here the rams usually dispense with territorial defence for only a few months over the dry season.

These territorial males become single-minded to the point of recklessness, barely stopping to eat, groom, sleep or watch for predators. They produce a loud roaring sound so unexpected from an antelope that more than one safariguess has mistaken it for the terrifying sound of a fearsome predator. These highly-strung rams are far from conflict-averse, and violent clashes and serious injuries are frequent. This constant activity takes a considerable toll on their physical health, and a male will often find themselves ousted by a fitter competitor. This is even more pronounced in East Africa, where the males have to try and maintain territories for longer.

Interestingly, this behaviour is also seen during the lambing season in southern Africa, albeit less dramatically. There is a corresponding spike in androgen levels in the males, which is still not fully understood, though it is probably related to the pheromones of the females in late-stage pregnancy.

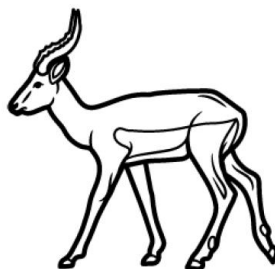
#### THE LAMBS OF SPRING (WELL, SUMMER)

There is a prevalent misconception that female impalas can delay the birth of their lambs for up to a month in anticipation of the arrival of the rains. However, this is a physiological impossibility – as an ewe cannot control her foetus's growth, and labour is triggered when the lamb reaches its full size. The arrival of some lambs later in the season can easily be explained by a later conception time –either because the ewe came into oestrus late or the first oestrus did not result in conception. Poor nutrition may also slow the growth of the foetus slightly. In southern Africa, the lambs are born around November and early December during this region's "baby season". A couple of days after birth, the mother will lead her lamb back to the herd, where it will join a nursery with the other newborns. These nurseries may be guarded by a few ewes or even left to fend for themselves for hours each day. When it comes time for the ewe to feed her baby, both mother and offspring bleat frantically until they are reunited. Like all ungulates, the lambs are quick to find their feet, and the sight of them bouncing around and showing off on absurdly spindly legs is utterly beguiling. Playfighting is a common sight, and the male lambs begin butting heads long before their horns grow.

The lambs are weaned as early as four months old, with just enough time for the females to try and recover body condition before the rut begins. To put her life into perspective, an impala ewe is pregnant for over six months, lactating for another four, and then has about a month to herself before the rams start chasing her from pillar to post. She will then fall pregnant again and grow a 5kg lamb during the dry season when available food is at its least nutritious. And, as if this wasn't enough, she can still run at over 75km/hour to escape predators. This should give some idea of the evolutionary marvel that is the Impala.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS ON IMPALA

The next time you happen to find yourself on safari, take a moment to stop with a herd of impalas and spend some time simply observing them. The Impala is the one animal you are almost guaranteed to spot on every game drive, so why not take the opportunity to appreciate them?



# CONSERVATION

## ELEPHANT NUMBERS AND THE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Kruger National Park has been grappling with the challenges of high elephant populations for some time. Back in 2004, concerns were raised when they had reached 0.56 elephants per square kilometre, even though experts believed issues could arise at densities as low as 0.37 elephants per square kilometre that might reduce population growth. Today, Kruger National Park is home to over 30,000 elephants, almost four times their originally suggested limit of 1.5 elephants per square kilometre.

The impact of elephants on the park's ecosystem has been evident. Notably, stands of aloes were nearly wiped out in the southern region. Between 1940 and 1960, there were no significant changes in tree density, but between 1960 and 1989, there was a dramatic decline in tree density, leading to a shift in the landscape's structural diversity. This change was particularly notable in areas where elephant densities had increased. The fire policies of that era were also considered a contributing factor. However, attributing all of these changes solely to elephants is challenging because other factors such as fire, other herbivores, drought, and soil conditions also play roles.

Balule Nature Reserve, which was largely free of elephants for over a century, saw an influx of elephants from the Kruger National Park starting in 2004. With the removal of fences, the number of elephants increased dramatically, especially in a year with good rainfall. However, the subsequent reduction in rainfall resulted in a lower elephant density. Balule's unique geographical location, being the westernmost part of the Greater Kruger system, has led to an artificial concentration of elephants during the winter census. This has caused continuous high impacts on the area's habitat, including the disappearance of certain types of vegetation.

The extensive tree survey conducted earlier this year indicated that the region lost approximately 65% of its trees, above three metres tall, of 10 essential tree species surveyed. The impact on, and decline in numbers of, other tree-dependent animal species is marked, such as vulture and raptor nests, giraffe, kudu, bushbuck and nyala populations. The overpopulation of elephants significantly and negatively impacts the region's flora and fauna biodiversity. Balule would be irresponsible to favour one species over all the others in the ecosystem that it is charged to conserve and protect.

Between 2015 and 2018, Balule experienced a significant increase in elephant populations, more than doubling their numbers over four years. By 2023, they reached a peak density of **3** elephants per square kilometre, significantly exceeding the recommended limit of 0.5 elephants per square kilometre. Elephant numbers based on the census conducted for the last 4 years are:

**2019 – 721 elephants**

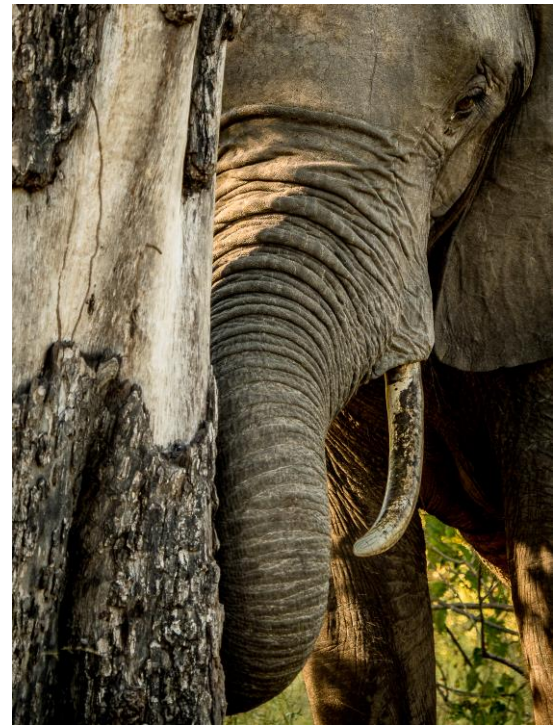
**2020 – 883 elephants**

**2021 – 1,053 elephants**

**2022 – 1,376 elephants**

**2023 – 1,581 elephants**

In modelling studies, it has been shown that very low elephant densities (0.5 elephants per square kilometre) are necessary to maintain a balance between tree loss and recruitment. Additionally, other factors like fire and climatic variability can impact woody vegetation dynamics when effective local elephant densities exceed 1-2 elephants per square kilometre. The Balule Elephant Management Plan is still a work in progress. Current legislation, logistical and social pressure preclude solving the problem.



## PROTECTING OUR TREES AT OLIFANTS

As stewards of this incredible ecosystem, it is our collective responsibility to ensure the preservation and conservation of our natural resources. This is an essential reminder regarding the cutting down or disturbance of vegetation within the reserve.

It has come to our attention that there have been instances of vegetation being removed or disturbed without prior consultation with the management. We wish to emphasize that this practice is strictly prohibited within Olifants River Game Reserve and carries severe legal consequences.

Our Use agreement states the following:

### Clause 6.1

The MEMBERS shall not cause or permit any disorderly conduct of whatsoever nature on the PROPERTY or do or permit any act, matter, or thing in or about the PROPERTY which shall constitute or cause damage, destruction, loss or a nuisance to the COMPANY or the PROPERTY or to any other occupant of, or flora or fauna on, the PROPERTY.

### Clause 8.

The MEMBER shall during his use and enjoyment of the PROPERTY protect all flora and fauna on the PROPERTY where possible.

The National Forests Act of 1998 (Act No. 84 of 1998) explicitly states that no person may cut, disturb, damage, destroy, or remove any protected tree without a license granted by the Minister or an exemption published by the Minister in the Gazette on the advice of the Council. This legislation is in place to safeguard our invaluable natural heritage.

We want to bring to your attention that there are seven species of trees within our reserve that are protected by law. These trees are:

- Berchmia zeyheri (Red Ivory)
- Boscia albitrunca (Shepherds Tree)
- Breonadia salicina (Matumi)
- Combretum imberbe (Leadwood)
- Diospyros mespiliformis (Jackal Berry)
- Philenoptera violacea (Apple Leaf)
- Sclerocarya birea (Marula)

Under Section 62(2)(c) of the National Forests Act, any person found contravening the prohibition on cutting, disturbing, damaging, destroying, removing, collecting, removing, transporting, exporting, purchasing, selling, donating, or acquiring any of these protected trees may be charged with a first category offence. Such offences are subject to penalties, including fines, imprisonment for up to three years, or a combination of both.

We implore all members to respect and adhere to the laws and regulations governing our reserve. The protection of these trees is vital not only for their ecological significance but also for the preservation of our unique environment.

Please contact me should you have any vegetation you wish to cut or trim so we can ensure it is done according to the environmental best practices. If you have any questions or require further information about these regulations or protected tree species, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. We are here to assist you and ensure that we continue to thrive as a responsible and environmentally-conscious community.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding in this matter. Together, we can maintain the beauty and integrity of Olifants River Game Reserve for generations to come.



## PLANNED ECOLOGICAL BURNS UPDATE

After careful consideration and a thorough assessment of the current environmental conditions within the planned blocks, we have made the decision not to proceed with the ecological burn of 380ha this year. However, we might burn a smaller block of only 48ha, depending on conditions. The primary factor influencing this decision is the uncertainty surrounding the quality and timing of next year's rainfall. Given the vital role that moisture plays in the recovery of the ecosystem post-burn, we believe it is prudent to exercise caution and preserve the existing grazing resources during this period of doubt. Our commitment to responsible land management and the long-term health of the environment guides this decision, as we aim to maintain a sustainable balance between conservation and ecological practices. We will continue to monitor conditions closely and make informed decisions in the best interest of our ecosystem's health and resilience.



## TOILET PAPER LITTER

We have recently noticed an increase in instances where used toilet paper has been left in the bush after bathroom breaks. We'd like to remind everyone of the importance of responsible and respectful practices while enjoying the reserve. Leaving toilet paper behind not only affects the aesthetics of our beautiful wilderness but also poses several significant issues. Firstly, it disrupts the natural balance of the ecosystem and can harm the local wildlife. Additionally, it can take a considerable amount of time for toilet paper to decompose, further impacting the environment. We kindly ask all members to dispose of used toilet paper properly by placing it in paper bags and disposing of it correctly by practising the "leave no trace" approach. Together, we can ensure the Olifants River Game Reserve remains a pristine and unspoiled haven for both its inhabitants and visitors.

We have bush loo/hygiene kits available in the shop as a solution for those who are struggling to deal with their guest's toilet paper in the bush. Please contact the office should you be interested.





# BALULE OUTREACH TRUST

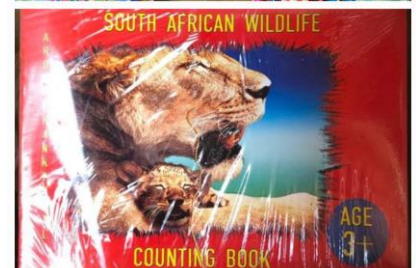
*INSPIRE    ENCOURAGE    EMPOWER*

The Balule Outreach Trust is committed to transforming the lives of those in the surrounding communities who are less fortunate than ourselves. We work symbiotically to facilitate a better life for all. This includes striving to educate families and individuals to become environmentally aware to protect and promote the biodiversity of the land and wildlife in our care. Further, we help to empower our local communities to develop themselves in a such manner that they can become better educated, healthy, financially secure and ultimately self-sufficient. Interested parties can contribute towards our endeavours and receive an 18A certificate (tax relief) by depositing into our bank account, using their name as the reference and emailing their proof of payment to [john@afgen.co.za](mailto:john@afgen.co.za). BALULE OUTREACH TRUST    First National Bank (FNB), Bryanston, South Africa    Account number: 6233 678 7877 Clearing Code: 250-017 Swift number: FIRNZAJJXXX

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN! We are delighted that the Balule Outreach Trust has once again been invited to participate in sales of the Charity Calendar – a project which contributes substantially every year to our funding! The theme of this, the 20th edition of the calendar, is “Maasai Mara”. Lex van Vught’s photographs are as always, outstanding and we urge you to have a look at them on the website at [www.thecharitycalendar.org](http://www.thecharitycalendar.org) for more information on their activities. All proceeds collected from sales made through the Trust will be donated to the Trust. We ask you to consider purchasing these calendars as year-end gifts for family, friends and colleagues. Your support is invaluable. The price of each calendar is R230.00. With your company logo in full colour on each page the price is R330.00 for minimum quantities of 30 calendars. Calendars will be delivered free of charge in the Johannesburg/Pretoria area and/or to ORGR for collection by yourselves. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact John Anderson on +27 83 255 3275.

BOREHOLE UPDATE: We are delighted to confirm that the Balule Outreach Trust will finance the resuscitation and maintenance of the borehole at the Drop-in-Centre in Maseke. The centre is a safe haven where around 200 children from the community are able to come to after school for a wholesome meal and guidance with their homework. We currently provide them with 200 food parcels monthly. Despite providing much-needed comforts for the children in terms of a fully equipped kitchen, playground equipment and large communal area with pristine ablution facilities, the borehole has not been operational for just over a year which has seriously hampered the effectiveness of essential water supplies not only from a hygiene perspective but also for the centre’s vegetable growing projects and water for cooking and drinking. Work is scheduled to commence within the next couple of weeks which will make a huge difference to so many lives and we thank all those involved for the recent progress in getting this off the ground.

THANK YOU! Heartfelt thanks again to members for their generosity: Aaron Frankental, for 30 more of his wild animal counting books for early learners; to Gen Thomas for the donation of 130 beautiful pencil bags for children which will be great for Christmas gifts - and to Elsabe Egan’s friend (and fan of ORGR) Henrietha Fazzini, for donating 6 boxes of loose beads which will be a great addition to sewing/craft groups in the outlying areas or schools. We are always grateful for all donations dropped off in the office and encourage everyone to continue – every contribution counts!



For those wishing to keep abreast with the needs/upliftment of the less privileged communities around us please contact Susan Harwood (Trustee of the Balule Outreach Trust and ORGR Board member) on 083 228 2546 to join the whatsapp group of like-minded individuals. Together we are making a difference!

*The coolest thing you can do is to be kind. Kindness is a superpower that can save unlimited lives at no cost!*

# MEMBERS UPDATES

## THE WEATHER REPORT

So, right now, we're in an El Niño phase, which is expected to hang around for most of the summer. Typically, El Niño means things get hotter and drier in Southern Africa from October to March. But hold on, the global predictions are throwing a bit of a curveball, making it a bit uncertain if we'll see the usual dry conditions in South Africa during El Niño.



Looking at the rainfall forecast, it seems like we're in for some good news in mid-spring (Sep-Oct-Nov) and late-spring (Oct-Nov-Dec) with above-average rainfall expected for most of the country. However, when we jump into early-summer (Nov-Dec-Jan), the central parts might get less rain than usual, while the north-east is looking like it'll have a wetter time.

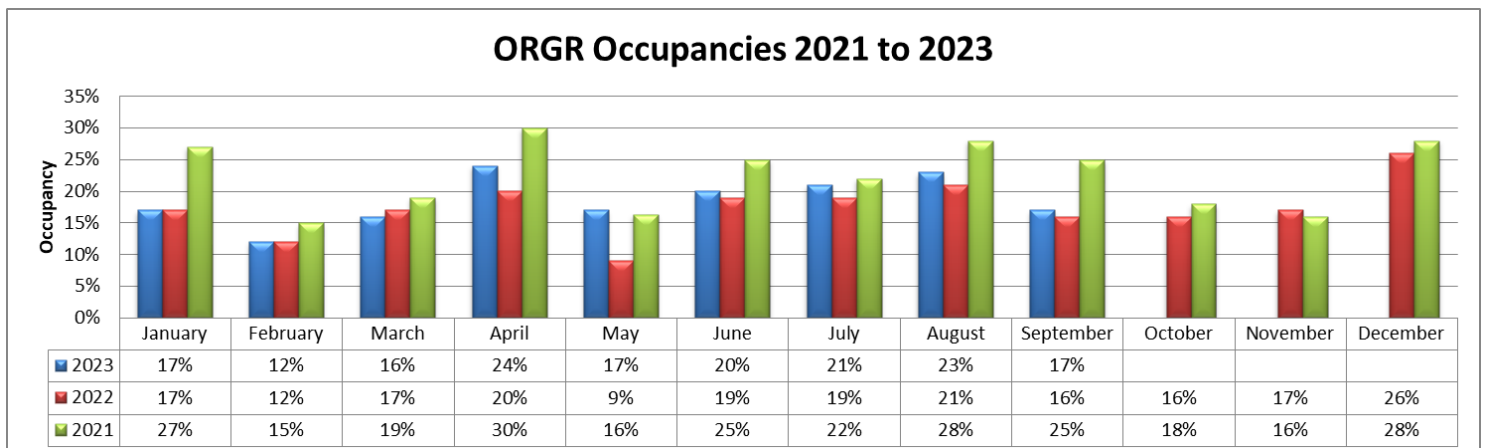
As for temperatures, it's leaning towards being hotter than usual across the country for the foreseeable future. So, there you have it, a quick update on what's cooking in our weather pot! We received 0,8mm of rain in August and a lovely 68mm of early rain in late September.

August 2023 Weather Summary - ORGR	High	Low	Average	September 2023 Weather Summary - ORGR	High	Low	Average
Temperature	36.8 °C	6.0 °C	19.5 °C	Temperature	40.8 °C	11.3 °C	23.9 °C
Dew Point	17.9 °C	-3.4 °C	10.7 °C	Dew Point	20.1 °C	-2.8 °C	12.4 °C
Humidity	92 %	12 %	60 %	Humidity	90 %	10 %	53 %
Precipitation	0.8 mm	--		Precipitation	68.85 mm	--	--
Wind Speed	21.9 km/h	0.0 km/h	5.2 km/h	Wind Speed	29.9 km/h	0.0 km/h	6.2 km/h
Wind Gust	33.0km/h	--	7.7 km/h	Wind Gust	45.1 km/h	--	9.1 km/h
Wind Direction	--	--	South	Wind Direction	--	--	South
Pressure	1,026.21 hPa	999.02 hPa	--	Pressure	1,021.17 hPa	995.43 hPa	--

## OCCUPANCIES

In August, the Olifants River Game Reserve recorded an average occupancy of 19 units, while September saw a lower occupancy rate, with only 17% of the units being occupied. During the peak of August, we welcomed a maximum of 30 units in residence, while our quietest day in the past two months saw only 5 units occupied.

Average Occupancies	
2023	19%
2022	17%
2021	22%
2020	22%
2019	14%



## OUR NIGHT SKY IN AUGUST



South Africa, with its diverse landscapes and relatively clear skies, offers stargazers a remarkable canvas for observing the wonders of the night sky. In the Southern Hemisphere, October and November usher in a season of celestial delights. As the days lengthen and the temperatures rise, the southern skies reveal a breathtaking array of stars, planets, and deep-sky objects. We explore some of the highlights that grace the South African night sky during these two captivating months.

### The Southern Cross and the Milky Way

One of the most iconic features of the Southern Hemisphere night sky is the Southern Cross or Crux. This small but distinctive constellation points the way to the South Pole and is accompanied by the sprawling beauty of the Milky Way. In October and November, the Milky Way arches high overhead, presenting an awe-inspiring river of stars, clusters, and nebulae. South Africans can enjoy sweeping views of our galaxy's spiral arms, creating an unforgettable celestial tapestry.

### Jupiter and Saturn

Two of the most prominent planets in our solar system, Jupiter and Saturn, grace the night sky during these months. Jupiter, with its distinct cloud bands and Galilean moons, is a captivating sight through binoculars or a telescope. Saturn, with its stunning ring system, is equally breathtaking. Observing the dance of these gas giants and their moons offers a glimpse into the grandeur of our cosmic neighbourhood.

### Orion and the Great Orion Nebula

Orion the Hunter, with its distinctive "belt" of three bright stars, rises prominently in the east. This constellation features several fascinating objects, including the Great Orion Nebula (M42/M43). Through binoculars or a telescope, the nebula reveals a stellar nursery where new stars are born, surrounded by intricate tendrils of gas and dust. Its sheer beauty and proximity make it a favourite among astronomers and amateur stargazers alike.

### The Eta Carinae Nebula

In the constellation Carina, the Eta Carinae Nebula (NGC 3372) is a sprawling, luminous cloud of gas and dust. Often referred to as the "Keyhole Nebula" due to its distinctive shape, this stellar nursery is home to massive stars and is a visual feast for those with access to dark skies and telescopes. Its vibrant colors and intricate details make it a remarkable target for astrophotography.

### The Magellanic Clouds

South Africa's southern location provides a unique opportunity to observe the Magellanic Clouds, two small galaxies that orbit our Milky Way. The Large Magellanic Cloud (LMC) and the Small Magellanic Cloud (SMC) are visible as faint, irregular patches of light. These galaxies, located relatively close to us, offer a tantalizing glimpse into the broader cosmos and serve as a reminder of the vastness of the universe.

October and November in South Africa offer an enchanting window into the celestial wonders of the Southern Hemisphere night sky. Whether you are a seasoned astronomer or simply a lover of natural beauty, the Southern Cross, the Milky Way, the gas giants, and the myriad of deep-sky objects beckon you to explore and marvel at the universe's grandeur. As you gaze up at the stars, consider the generations of stargazers who have looked upon the same night sky, and let its timeless beauty inspire awe and wonder.

## Some Quick facts about our Galaxy

**Name:** The name "Milky Way" is derived from its appearance as a faint band of light that stretches across the night sky, resembling spilled milk.

**Type:** The Milky Way is a barred spiral galaxy, meaning it has a central bar-shaped region surrounded by spiral arms.

**Size:** It is estimated to have a diameter of about 100,000 to 120,000 light-years, making it a fairly large galaxy.

**Stars:** The Milky Way is home to more than 100 billion stars, and possibly many more, including our Sun.

**Location:** Our solar system is located in one of the spiral arms of the Milky Way, known as the Orion Arm or Local Spur.

**Mass:** The Milky Way has a mass of approximately 1.5 trillion times the mass of our Sun.

**Age:** It is believed to be around 13.6 billion years old, roughly the same age as the universe itself.

## **RADIO MIGRATION UPDATE**

We're gearing up for the final stretch of our radio network upgrade, going from good ol' analog to the shiny new digital system. It's been a two-year journey, giving all our members ample time to make the switch to digital radios. We've been rolling with the analog repeater as our main squeeze during this transition, but the digital world is calling, and we're ready to answer.

Guess what? More than seventy percent of our members have already hopped on the digital train – kudos to them! We've even got the digital repeater all set up with the fresh Game Drive channel, just waiting to rock and roll.

Now, here's the deal: We have set a deadline for November 30th, 2023. Yep, that's the date we want everyone to have their digital radios up and running. Starting December 1st, 2023, we'll bid a fond farewell to the old analog repeater – it's retirement time. From then on, all our game drive chatter will happen on the new, super-smooth digital channel.

So, here's the friendly nudge – please, pretty please, make sure you've got those digital radios sorted before the deadline. We wouldn't want anyone to be left in the silent woods without a way to chat, now would we?

## **FINANCIAL LITERACY TRAINING**

We are thrilled to announce the successful implementation of our Financial Literacy program in collaboration with ASISA (Association for Savings and Investment South Africa) for our dedicated staff. This initiative is a significant step towards empowering our team members with essential financial knowledge and skills. It's crucial to recognize that many of our employees come from lower-income rural communities, where access to financial education may be limited. By providing them with the tools to understand the importance of saving for their future, we are not only enhancing their individual financial well-being but also contributing to the overall economic resilience of these communities. We believe that financial literacy is a catalyst for positive change, allowing our staff to make informed decisions, plan for their futures, and ultimately improve their quality of life. We are committed to continuing such programs that uplift our team and their communities.

This training was arranged by GKEPF at no cost to us whatsoever! Many thanks to the Greater Kruger Environmental Protection Foundation (GKEPF) and to ASISA for making this available to our staff.



## THE FINAL WORD

As we wrap up this edition of the Olifants River Game Reserve newsletter, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of our incredible members. Your dedication to preserving and enjoying this piece of paradise is truly remarkable and we couldn't be more grateful for your continued support. We eagerly anticipate the day when we can welcome you back to our treasured haven, where the wild heart of Africa beats strong. Until then, stay safe, stay adventurous! We can't wait to see you soon.



*In Africa's realm where grasslands stretch,  
A mighty beast, the buffalo, we sketch.  
With horns that curl like crescent moon,  
They roam the savannah, a wild monsoon.*

*In herds they gather, a thundering sight,  
Black hides glistening in the golden light.  
Guardians of the plains, both fierce and bold,  
In their ancient story, tales of legends told.*

*Through thorny thickets and rivers wide,  
They navigate, with grace, side by side.  
Their strength unmatched, a symbol of might,  
Buffalo, the untamed, in the day and night.*

*In dust they bathe, a ritual dance,  
A cloak of earth, their fierce defense.  
Beneath the African sun's fiery blaze,  
Buffalo persist, their ancient ways.*

*From predator's chase to endless plains,  
African buffalo, forever sustains.  
In this untamed land, their spirits run free,  
A symbol of Africa's wild, wild glee.*

All the best. Warmest regards,

**Nick Leuenberger**  
Warden



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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