



NEWSLETTER

December 2023 Issue

Quick Bushbaby Facts

Nocturnal Marvels: Bushbabies, also known as galagos, are nocturnal creatures, meaning they are primarily active during the night. Their large, round eyes are adapted for low-light conditions, allowing them to navigate and hunt in the darkness.

Acrobatic Experts: These small primates are excellent jumpers and climbers. They are known for their remarkable leaping abilities, capable of jumping up to 2 meters in a single bound. Their agility helps them navigate through the trees with ease.

Distinctive Ears: Bushbabies have large, bat-like ears that contribute to their exceptional hearing abilities. Their ears can rotate independently, helping them detect sounds from various directions and locate potential prey or predators.

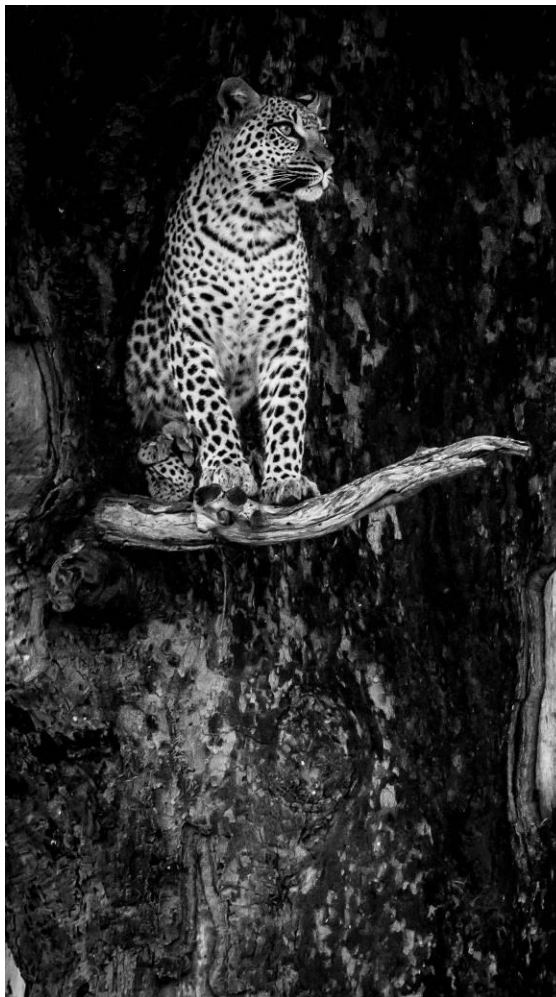
Unique Vocalizations: Bushbabies are known for their diverse and distinctive vocalizations. They communicate using a range of calls, from soft whistles to loud screams. These calls are essential for maintaining social bonds and establishing territories.

Insectivorous Diet: The primary diet of bushbabies consists of insects, such as moths, beetles, and spiders. They are also known to consume fruits, tree gums, and the occasional small vertebrates. Their diet is adapted to their arboreal lifestyle.

Nocturnal Nests: During the day, bushbabies sleep in nests made of leaves and branches, often hidden in the foliage of trees. These nests serve as a safe and secluded space for resting and avoiding predators.

DEAR OLIFANTS FAMILY

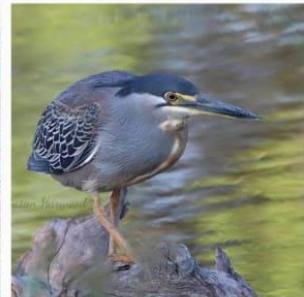
As the radiant sun casts its golden glow upon the boundless plains of our cherished reserve, we extend warm seasons greetings to each member of our extraordinary community. With the advent of summer, the African bushveld comes alive with an enchanting vibrancy, painting the landscape with hues of green and gold. The air is filled with the symphony of nature's melody, echoing the joys of life flourishing in every corner of the reserve. Amidst the lush foliage and under the expansive sky, we find ourselves immersed in the beauty and wonders that the summer season brings to our beloved Olifants River Game Reserve.



"In the heart of the African night, the leopard prowls with a grace that echoes the poetry of the savannah, its spots a constellation of beauty against the canvas of moonlit mystery."

ORGR GAME DRIVE

Over the past weeks, the reserve has been graced by the presence of the elusive and charismatic Wild Dogs, offering multiple sightings to fortunate onlookers. These remarkable creatures, known for their cooperative hunting and distinctive markings, have been a highlight of recent game drives, showcasing the dynamic biodiversity of our reserve. Carnivore enthusiasts have been treated to exceptional sightings, as the bush comes alive with the majestic presence of both leopards and lions. The great carnivore viewing experiences are a testament to the thriving ecosystem that sustains these magnificent predators. In the realm of giants, the reserve continues to host a considerable number of elephants. These gentle giants, with their impressive herds, add an undeniable sense of majesty to the landscape. The skies above and the branches of the trees are abuzz with the vibrant energy of birdlife at its peak. Our avian residents are putting on a spectacular show, showcasing a kaleidoscope of colours and melodies. From striking raptors to the charming songbirds, our feathered friends are a constant reminder of the rich biodiversity that graces our skies. As for the general game, the reserve is teeming with life. The plains are adorned with a diverse array of wildlife, from the graceful impalas to the stately kudus. However, stealing the spotlight are the impala lambs, whose boundless energy and playful antics have been a source of joy and entertainment for all fortunate enough to witness their exuberance!



CREATURE FEATURE: THE VERVET MONKEY

The Enchanting World of the Vervet Monkey: A Closer Look at Chlorocebus pygerythrus



In the heart of Africa, amidst the lush canopies and vibrant ecosystems, resides an enchanting primate species known as the Vervet Monkey (*Chlorocebus pygerythrus*). Renowned for their distinctive appearance, social complexity, and adaptive behaviors, these monkeys have carved a unique niche in the intricate tapestry of African biodiversity.

Taxonomy and Distribution:

Belonging to the family Cercopithecidae, the Vervet Monkey is classified under the genus *Chlorocebus*. Their geographic range spans from South Africa through East Africa, showcasing their adaptability to a variety of habitats, including savannas, woodlands, and riverine forests.

Morphology:

The Vervet Monkey boasts a striking appearance with a distinctive coat coloration. Their fur, ranging from silver-grey to greenish-olive, serves as effective camouflage within their arboreal habitats. Notably, the face exhibits a black mask, framed by white sideburns, contributing to their charismatic and easily recognizable countenance.

Social Structure:

Vervet Monkeys are highly social beings, organizing themselves into multi-male, multi-female groups. These communities are characterized by a complex network of social interactions, including grooming, vocalizations, and hierarchical structures. The intricate social fabric plays a pivotal role in their survival and adaptation strategies.

Communication:

Communication within Vervet Monkey groups is a symphony of vocalizations, gestures, and expressions. Their alarm calls are particularly noteworthy, demonstrating a sophisticated system where specific calls alert the group to different types of predators. This ability to convey nuanced information through vocalizations underscores their high level of intelligence and cooperative behavior.

Feeding Habits:

Vervet Monkeys are omnivorous, with a diet comprising fruits, leaves, seeds, insects, and small vertebrates. Their adaptability to diverse food sources allows them to thrive in various environments. This flexibility is particularly evident in their ability to exploit anthropogenic food resources when living in proximity to human settlements.



Reproduction:

Breeding in Vervet Monkey groups follows a polygynous system, where dominant males have priority in mating. Females give birth to a single offspring after a gestation period of around six months. The close-knit social structure contributes to the collective care of infants, fostering a supportive environment for their development.

Conservation Status:

While Vervet Monkeys are not currently considered endangered, their populations face threats from habitat loss, fragmentation, and human-wildlife conflict. Conservation efforts are crucial to ensure the long-term survival of these captivating primates.

The Vervet Monkey, with its captivating appearance, intricate social dynamics, and adaptive prowess, stands as a testament to the remarkable diversity of life within African ecosystems. As stewards of our planet, it is our responsibility to appreciate, understand, and conserve these unique species, ensuring a harmonious coexistence between humanity and the enchanting creatures that share our world.



CONSERVATION

PREDATOR BOMA UPDATE

In the heart of the Olifants River Game Reserve, a temporary haven stands tall, enclosing a pack of 16 Wild Dogs - spirited creatures with a tumultuous history. Originating from KwaZulu-Natal, these endangered canines found themselves at the centre of a conservation odyssey that brought them to the Predator Boma.

The journey of these Wild Dogs began when they were introduced into the Selati Game Reserve, a decision intended to bolster their population and preserve the genetic diversity of this endangered species. However, unforeseen challenges arose as the pack continuously broke out of the reserve, posing a threat to themselves and the ecological balance of the region.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, our team intervened, orchestrating the capture of the dogs. The process was arduous and traumatic for the creatures, emphasizing the balance between the conservation of endangered species and the welfare of individual animals. The team's commitment, expertise, and compassion played a pivotal role in ensuring the successful relocation of the Wild Dogs to the boma on ORGR.

This enclosure serves as a transitional refuge, providing a safe space for the Wild Dogs to acclimate to their new surroundings. Despite the initial challenges, the pack has gradually settled into their temporary home; and as the days unfold, the team works tirelessly to ensure the well-being of the precious inhabitants, addressing their physical and psychological needs. This much-needed respite is a crucial chapter in the ongoing saga of conservation efforts, symbolizing the delicate dance between human intervention and the intrinsic resilience of wildlife.



Looking ahead, the horizon holds a promise of freedom for the canines. Plans are in motion to release them into the vast expanse of the northern Kruger National Park in the new year. This marks a significant milestone in their journey, a return to the untamed wilderness where they can roam freely, contributing to the delicate balance of nature.

The successful care and rehabilitation of these 16 Wild Dogs at ORGR stand as a testament to the unwavering dedication of our team. Their efforts embody the delicate art of balancing the preservation of endangered species with the intricate needs of individual animals, fostering hope for a harmonious coexistence between humanity and the wild.

REACHING OUT

ORGR STAFF CHRISTMAS PARTY

Our gratitude is directed not only towards the breathtaking wildlife that calls the reserve home but also towards the unsung heroes who tirelessly work behind the scenes – the ORGR staff. As the holiday spirit fills the air, the reserve was abuzz with anticipation of the annual Staff Christmas Party. This festive event, organized by compassionate members of the ORGR team, is a celebration of gratitude, camaraderie, and the spirit of giving and took place on Saturday 16th.

It was a truly memorable event, thanks to the collective effort and generosity of the team and the thoughtful contributions from everyone involved, namely the wonderful members of our ORGR community which rallied together to provide an impressive amount over R20k. The funds raised were not only used to cover the costs of the carefully curated gifts, but also contributed significantly to the catering budget.

The behind-the-scenes magic involves not only selecting the perfect, age-appropriate gifts for each child but also ensuring that the festive spirit reaches every corner of the reserve. A big thank-you goes to Sue Harwood, as the driving force behind this project. The meticulous planning and execution of this gift-giving initiative are testament to the sense of unity and care that defines the ORGR family. A special mention also goes to Alison Munro, whose thoughtful efforts in arranging transportation with one of her guests heading to the reserve ensured that the gifts and the festive cheer timeously reached their destination.

Thank you so much to all involved. The sheer excitement on the faces of the staff's offspring throughout the magical event was in itself, a joy to behold!

KIDS 4 A CAUSE DO IT AGAIN!

Another heartfelt thank you to the Daly family, whose grandchildren from Florida raised an impressive sum of money which was donated to the Enviro Centre in Sigagule. Over and above this extremely kind gesture, the group handed out solar lamps, soccer balls, clothing, tooth brushes & paste and care-packs to over 100 families in the Acornhoek area. A wonderful project which has brought light, hope and goodwill to many. What great role models these young boys are!

“It takes a village to raise a child. Not only that but to create a bright future for our generation. With the problems South Africa is facing due to Load shedding, it has put a negative impact on our youth as they study in the dark. A huge thank you to [#kids4acause](#) for their generous donation towards enviro training. With every light there shall be hope. Enviro Training Africa stands to help students reach the best version of themselves in everything they do. We offer our community the opportunity to improve their educational level to the best of their abilities using resources given to us by nature”.



MEMBERS UPDATES

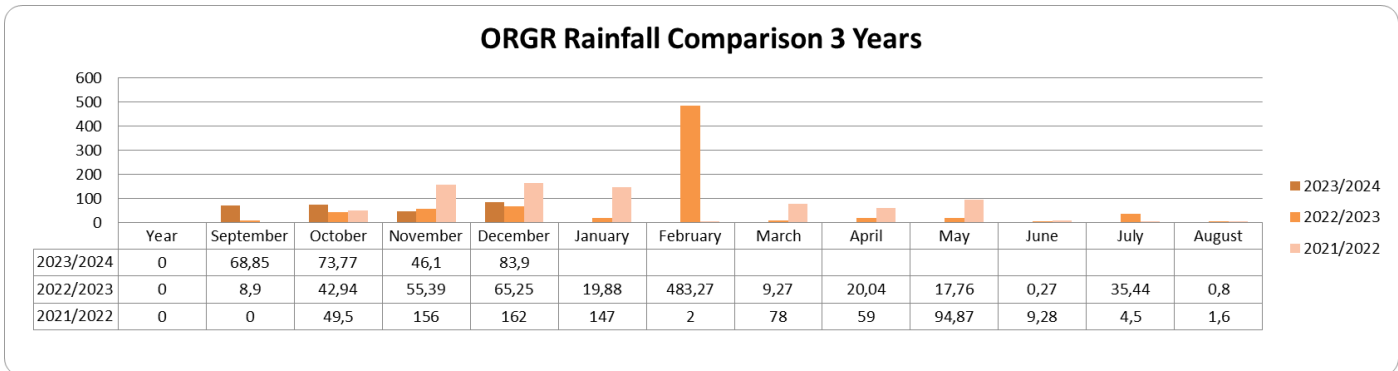
THE WEATHER REPORT

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is currently in a robust El Niño state, and it's anticipated to stick around through the upcoming 2023/2024 summer. The peak is expected during mid-summer, likely hitting the very strong category, with a subsequent weakening and a shift to ENSO neutral conditions by the winter of the coming year. ENSO typically means drier and warmer conditions in Southern Africa from October to March. However, there's some uncertainty in global forecasts about the usual dry conditions in South Africa during El Niño, especially in the eastern regions.



According to the multi-model rainfall forecast from the South African Weather Service (SAWS), below-normal rainfall is on the horizon for most of the country during Dec-Jan-Feb (DJF), Jan-Feb-Mar (JFM), and Feb-Mar-Apr (FMA). There's a slight twist in DJF, where some areas in the eastern interior might see a chance of above-normal rainfall, although probabilities are low. The latest update from October 2023 leans towards below-normal rainfall for the eastern parts, but keep in mind that these probabilities are still relatively low.

On a different note, looking at our recent rainfall, we received 73.77mm in October and 46.1mm in November, bringing our season total to 188.72mm.



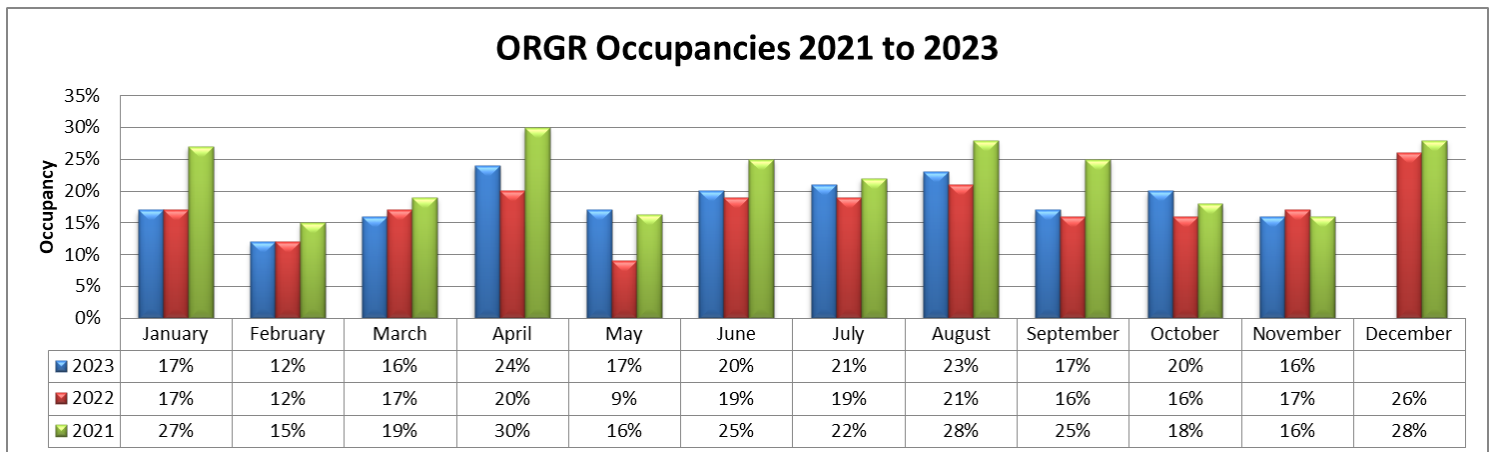
October 2023 Weather Summary - ORGR	High	Low	Average	November 2023 Weather Summary - ORGR	High	Low	Average
Temperature	39.0 °C	10.7 °C	23.1 °C	Temperature	42.5 °C	13.7 °C	26.3 °C
Dew Point	20.7 °C	6.0 °C	14.1 °C	Dew Point	22.8 °C	10.1 °C	16.3 °C
Humidity	93 %	16 %	60 %	Humidity	93 %	18 %	58 %
Precipitation	73,77mm			Precipitation	46,1mm		
Wind Speed	26.2 km/h	0.0 km/h	6.8 km/h	Wind Speed	25.3 km/h	0.0 km/h	5.2 km/h
Wind Gust	37.0 km/h	--	10.1 km/h	Wind Gust	37.0 km/h	--	8.0 km/h
Wind Direction	--	--	SSE	Wind Direction	--	--	SSE
Pressure	1,019.64 hPa	869.22 hPa	--	Pressure	1,015.92 hPa	994.45 hPa	--

2023 Weather Records		
Highest Wind Gust:	45 Km/h	2023/09/26 20:44
Highest Recorded Average Wind Speed:	30 Km/h	2023/09/26 20:44
Average Annual Wind Speed:	5.459 Km/h	
Highest Recorded Temperature:	42,5 °C	2023/11/20 15:05
Average Annual Temperature:	23 °C	
Lowest Recorded Temperature:	5.8°C	2023/07/19 06:34
Highest Days Rain:	129.06 mm	2023/02/10 23:54

OCCUPANCIES

October at Olifants River Game Reserve welcomed a bustling rhythm, with an average of 17 units embracing the wild tales of the bushveld. Even the tranquil moments held a sense of adventure, as the quietest day witnessed 10 units in their wildlife abodes, while the liveliest day echoed with the presence of 17 units, each a chapter in the reserve's vibrant narrative. As November unfolded, the pulse of the reserve continued, with an average of 13 units becoming part of the wilderness tapestry. The quieter days whispered with the secrets of 9 units, while the most grand day showcased a vibrant symphony with 18 units harmonizing in the heart of the reserve.

Average Occupancies	
2023	18%
2022	17%
2021	22%
2020	22%
2019	14%

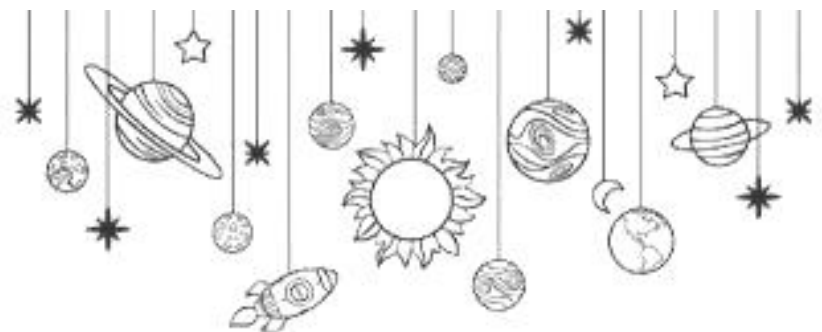


OUR NIGHT SKY IN AUGUST

In a nutshell...

Moon

Date	Time	Phase
05/12	07h49	Last Quarter
13/12	01h32	New Moon
19/12	20h39	First Quarter
27/12	02h33	Full Moon



Moon – Earth Relations

Perigee: 367 901 km on 16/12 at 20h52
 Apogee: 404 346 km on 04/12 at 20h41

Planet Visibility

Mercury is not visible this month

Venus is visible near the stars of the constellation Virgo in the morning sky

Mars is not visible this month

Jupiter is visible near the stars of the constellation Pisces throughout most of the night

Saturn is visible near the stars of the constellation Aquarius in the evening sky

December in the Southern Hemisphere offers a celestial spectacle with a variety of astronomical highlights. Here are some notable events to look out for:

1. **Summer Solstice (Around December 21):**

- December marks the beginning of summer in the Southern Hemisphere, and the Summer Solstice occurs around December 21st. On this day, the South Pole is tilted towards the Sun, resulting in the longest day and shortest night of the year.

2. **Geminid Meteor Shower (Mid-December):**

- The Geminid meteor shower is one of the most reliable and active meteor showers of the year. It usually peaks around mid-December, offering a stunning display of shooting stars. Find a dark location away from city lights for the best viewing experience.

3. **Milky Way in Full Glory:**

- December is an excellent month for observing the Milky Way in the Southern Hemisphere. The central region of our galaxy, including the dense star fields of the Galactic Center, is prominently visible during the summer months.

4. **Venus as the Evening Star:**

- Venus, often referred to as the "Evening Star," is visible in the western sky after sunset. Its brightness and visibility make it a prominent object, and you can follow its changing phases through a telescope.

5. **Southern Cross and Magellanic Clouds:**

- The Southern Cross (Crux) and the two Magellanic Clouds (Small and Large) are prominent features of the Southern Hemisphere's night sky. They are visible throughout December and are iconic celestial landmarks.

6. **Lunar Events:**

- Keep an eye on the Moon's phases and events, such as First Quarter, Full Moon, and Last Quarter. The Moon's changing position in the sky can enhance or interfere with observations of other celestial objects.

Remember that astronomical events can be best enjoyed in areas with minimal light pollution. So, if possible, head to a dark sky location to fully appreciate the beauty of the Southern Hemisphere's night sky in December.

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



BIG BIRDING DAY

Hey, Bird Nerds and Feathered Friends Enthusiasts! Guess what? It's that time of the year again! Join us for a spectacular ORGR Birding Day on December 22, 2023. Yes, mark your calendars! If you're chilling at the reserve around that time, consider forming a team of 2 to 8 birders and let the good times fly. To register, shoot over your team's coolest name (make it fun!) along with the participant list to: warden@olifantsreserve.co.za by December 20th, 2023 – easy peasy.

Here are the laid-back rules for the day:

- From midnight on Thursday, December 21st, to midnight on Friday, December 22nd, record every bird you spot or hear during this 24-hour avian adventure.
- Jot down your list (paper works, but we're all about that tech life – consider the BirdLasser mobile app, and hit me up for the deets).
- Majority rules – make sure 2 or 3 of your bird-loving buddies agree on a call or sighting.
- Easy on the callbacks, folks – let's keep it bird-friendly.
- Stick to the ORGR and ONGR properties for your birdwatching quest.
- Most importantly, have a blast and soak in the feathered wonders of the day!



Remember to share your Bird list with me via email by 08h00 on Saturday, December 23rd– the BirdLasser App makes it a breeze. Oh, and the grand prize moment? That's going down at Sunset Plains at 18h00 on Saturday 23rd December. Be there or beak-square!

And hey, rumor has it the Olifants Management will be bringing their A-game birders. Ready to spread your wings and challenge us? Let the birding bonanza begin! #BirdingDayJoy #FeatheredFiesta #ChallengeAccepted

ORGR GIN

We're delighted to share that our renowned ORGR Gin is still gracing the shelves of our shop, ready to be the ideal companion for your Safari sundowners, festive gatherings, or thoughtful gifts to your loved ones. Beyond its exceptional taste, each purchase of this exquisite gin contributes to our Anti-Poaching Unit (APU) operations.

Since its inception, thanks to your continued support and enjoyment of this exceptional beverage, we've been able to raise over R190k. This substantial contribution plays a vital role in safeguarding our rhinos and ensuring the ongoing success of our conservation efforts. So, let's raise our glasses and say "cheers" to a spirit that not only tantalizes the



taste buds but also protects the majestic rhinos we hold dear. Your commitment to savouring this unique spirit truly goes a long way and we extend our heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you.

GAMEVIEWING PROTOCOL REMINDERS

As we head into one of our busiest periods of the year, it is important for us to revisit some of the rules and regulations to ensure everyone has an enjoyable experience out on game drives. We would like to kindly remind all members of their crucial role in ensuring compliance with the regulations, both for themselves and their guests. It's essential to establish and maintain appropriate procedures within your units to promote awareness and adherence to the rules and regulations of our reserves.

Reminders

- The behaviour of children must be monitored. In the event of a child causing a disturbance at a sighting, the vehicle should leave.
- Do not stand up in the vehicle while it is moving or stationary at a sighting and try to not break the line of the vehicle.
- Do not hang onto the outside of the vehicle or ride on the tailgate.
- Driveways to units are private.
- Use of two spotlights on a single vehicle is permissible when searching for game, but only one spotlight should be used at a sighting. When multiple vehicles are at a sighting, use of more than one spotlight is at the discretion of the person in control of the sighting.
- Do not shine spotlights at other vehicles, people or lodges. While at a night sighting, the use of red filters is encouraged.
- Do not shine the spotlight into the eyes of the animals. Rather, when viewing animals at night, shine the spotlight slightly away from, or above the animal/s and view the animal/s in the peripheral to reduce harsh light.
- Game drives are to be conducted in game viewing vehicles unless prior permission from reserve management has been obtained for an alternative.
- The reserve speed limit is 30 km/hr.
- Driving off road and in riverbeds is not permitted.
- Alighting from your vehicle within 200m of any waterhole is not permitted; nor is it permitted within sight of a waterhole unless there exists provision to do so (such as to enter a hide or at lookout points). Note that this does not apply to the river.



THE FINAL WORD

As we wrap up this newsletter, we extend our warmest wishes to each and every member of the vibrant Olifants River Game Reserve family. May the festive season bring you joyful celebrations, laughter and cherished moments with loved ones. It is our wish for you that the new year be filled with exciting adventures, discoveries in the wild, and a flourishing connection with nature. Safe travels...see you in the reserve soon!



Warmest regards

Nick and the Olifants River Game Reserve Team!



*“Beneath the acacia's gentle shade,
Where golden grass in whispers swayed,
In the heart of the bushveld wide, Christmas comes with nature's pride.*

*The baobabs wear a festive dress,
A timeless symbol, nothing less.
Their ancient roots, a gift profound, In the African bush, joy is found.*

*Elephants trumpeting in delight,
Underneath the stars so bright.
A leopard's spots, a gift bestowed, In the secret tales the bushveld's told.*

Impala dance with boundless glee, A festive, wild jubilee. The river's melody joins the cheer, Christmas magic lingers near.

Amidst the thorns and plains so grand, A Christmas tale unfolds, unplanned. Nature's gift, both wild and free, Merry Christmas in the bush, you see.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Night Sky – SAOO