

### Quick Hippo Facts

**River giants:** Despite their name, which means "river horse" in Greek, hippos aren't actually horses or fantastic swimmers! They are the third-largest land mammals on Earth, after elephants and white rhinos.

**Underwater dwellers:** Hippos spend most of their days submerged in water to keep cool and protect their skin from the sun. They can even hold their breath for up to seven minutes, but typically surface every few minutes to breathe automatically.

**Built for grazing:** While they may look bulky, hippos are actually herbivores. They come out of the water at night to graze on grass, using their powerful lips to consume massive quantities.

**Natural sunscreen:** Hippos secrete a red, oily substance that acts as a natural moisturizer, sunscreen, and antibacterial agent. This red sweat gives the impression they are sweating blood.

**Social creatures:** Hippos live in groups called herds, with females being dominant. These herds can number up to 100 individuals.

**Formidable fighters:** Hippos are highly territorial and possess some of the strongest bites in the animal kingdom, with a force of over 2,000 pounds per square inch. Their sharp canine teeth can inflict serious injuries.

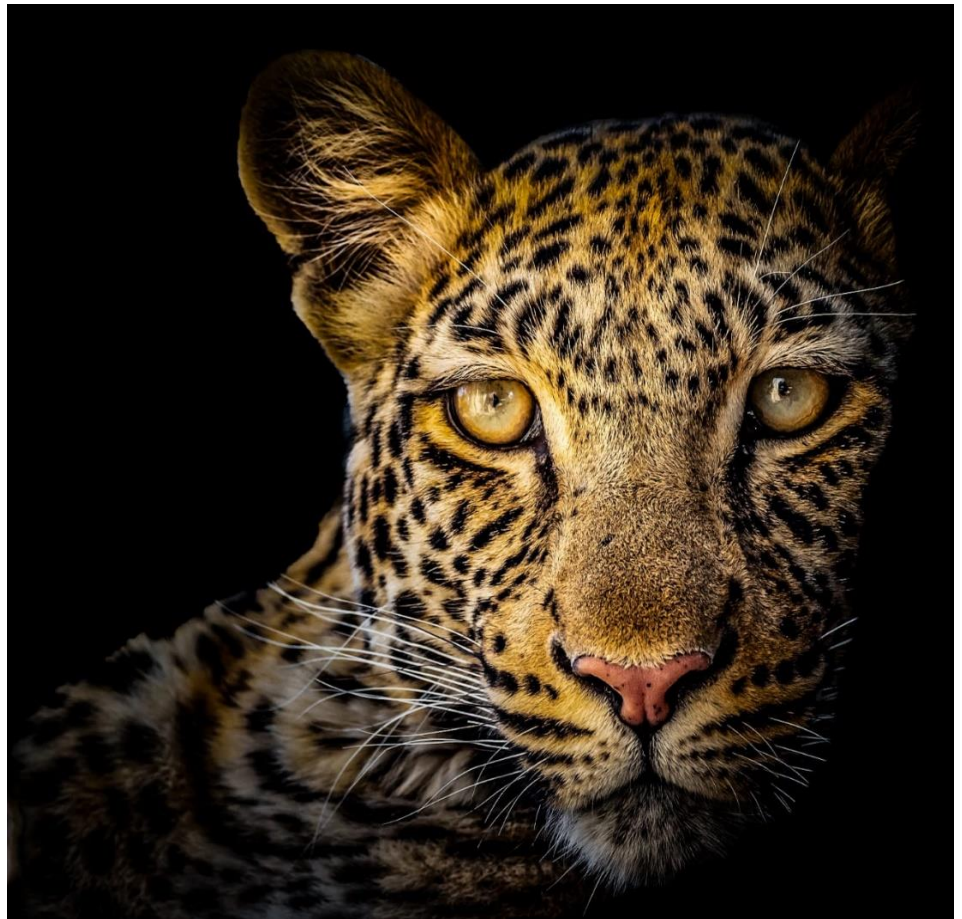
**Secret weapon:** Believe it or not, hippos can spray their poop over long distances to mark their territory.

# NEWSLETTER

April 2024 Issue

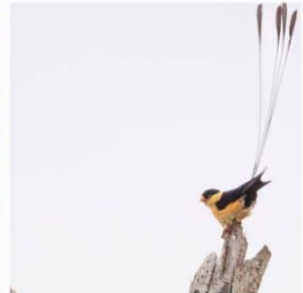
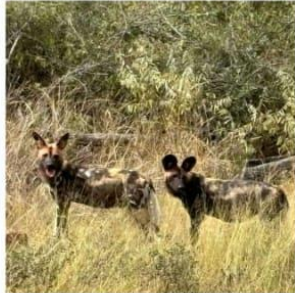
## DEAR OLIFANTS FAMILY

As we turn the page to April, we at the Olifants River Game Reserve hope you all enjoyed a relaxing and joyful Easter celebration. With the holiday cheer still fresh in our minds, we also welcome the arrival of autumn here in the reserve. The air carries a crispness, and the leaves on the Bushwillow trees begin to show hints of golden hues. This seasonal shift brings a fascinating transformation to our environment – one we're excited to share with you in this month's newsletter...



## ORGR GAME DRIVE

Olifants River Game Reserve is currently buzzing with incredible sightings, and it seems the cats are putting on a show! Recent reports indicate exceptional leopard activity, with these elusive predators being spotted frequently. Lions, while a bit scarce, have still graced viewers with their presence, offering high-quality encounters. A pack of five wild dogs, a rare and thrilling sight, has become a regular feature within the reserve. This dynamic group adds another layer of wonder to any game drive. For cheetah fans, there was a special treat recently. A magnificent male cheetah made a week-long appearance in the Sable Plains area, offering a truly unforgettable experience. The reserve's herbivore populations are thriving as well. Buffalo herds remain a regular sight, while the "old Dagga boys," solitary or territorial male Buffalo, continue to be spotted across the reserve. General game viewing is also reported to be good, providing a well-rounded safari experience. However, it's worth noting that elephant numbers, whilst still high overall, have seen a slight decrease in the past two weeks. This could be due to natural movements within the reserve's unfenced system. With leopards dominating the spotlight, a vibrant pack of wild dogs and even a dazzling cheetah encounter, this reserve promises an unforgettable African adventure.



## CREATURE FEATURE: THE UNSUNG HEROES OF THE VELD, DUNG BEETLES



South Africa's natural beauty is renowned for its majestic landscapes and charismatic megafauna. Yet, beneath the towering mountains and roaming giants lies a hidden world teeming with unsung heroes – the dung beetles. These industrious insects, far from repulsive, play a vital ecological role, silently shaping the health of the environment.

With a staggering diversity of over 780 species, South Africa boasts one of the richest dung beetle communities on Earth. Ranging from tiny, 5mm miners to giants reaching a colossal 50mm, these resourceful beetles come in various shapes and sizes. But it's their remarkable behaviour that truly sets them apart.

Dung beetles can be broadly classified based on their ingenious ways of utilizing dung. The most iconic are the "rollers," also known as telecoprids. These skilled sculptors mould the dung into perfect spheres, many times their own weight! Imagine pushing a giant beach ball – that's the impressive feat of strength a dung beetle performs. The male then navigates the precious ball, using the Milky Way's starlight to maintain a straight course, until it's buried underground. Here, the female lays her eggs within the dung ball, providing a safe haven and nutritious food source for her developing offspring.

But the dung beetle world is far from a monoculture. Endocoprids prefer to stay within the dung pile, carving out a cosy home for their brood. Paracoprids, on the other hand, are efficient burrowers, creating tunnels beneath

the dung to store provisions for their young. There are even kleptocoprids, the "cleptomaniacs" of the beetle world, who steal the meticulously crafted balls of their roller kin!

The ecological significance of these tireless dung processors is undeniable. By rapidly removing dung, they prevent the spread of parasites and diseases that could harm grazing animals. Their tunnelling activities aerate the soil, promoting healthy plant growth. Most importantly, they act as nature's recyclers, breaking down dung into nutrients readily absorbed by plants, fuelling the entire ecosystem. Studies have shown that areas with healthy dung beetle populations have significantly improved soil fertility and pasture quality.

South Africa's dung beetles are not just ecological workhorses; they are also fascinating examples of adaptation and resilience. The flightless dung beetle of Addo Elephant National Park, for instance, has evolved alongside the park's massive elephant herds. These beetles thrive on the sheer volume of elephant dung, showcasing a remarkable adaptation to a specific food source.

However, these essential insects face threats. Habitat loss due to agricultural expansion and the misuse of pesticides can disrupt their vital work. By appreciating the crucial role dung beetles play and implementing sustainable practices, we can ensure these silent heroes continue their vital work for generations to come.

So, the next time you visit Olifants, spare a thought for the dung beetles diligently plying their trade beneath the surface. These fascinating creatures are a testament to nature's ingenuity and a vital cog in the intricate machinery of a healthy ecosystem.



# CONSERVATION

## Veld Restoration Success at the Reserve

Our reserve has seen incredible progress in restoring degraded areas over the past few years. These projects require patience, as nature heals at its own pace. However, I'm thrilled to share the positive outcomes from two specific zones: Serengeti Plains and Sable Plains/Two Trees.

### **Serengeti Plains:** From Fields to Grasslands

Previously used for agriculture, Serengeti Plains suffered from compacted soil, hindering natural grass growth. In 2020, we addressed this by breaking up the soil (ripping) and reseeding with indigenous grasses. Keeping grazing impala away from the young plants proved challenging initially. However, with time and perseverance, the grasses have flourished, kickstarting the area's natural recovery.



### **Sable Plains & Two Trees:** Erosion Under Control

These areas faced a severe erosion problem. To tackle this, we employed a strategy of packing the erosion starting points (heads) with small rocks and special rock cages (gabions). This technique reduced water flow and allowed sediment to build up, filling the gullies. The success of this approach at Sable Plains/Two Trees has led us to implement the same solution at the Big Dam erosion sites, aiming for a full restoration in the coming years.



These projects demonstrate the effectiveness of combining human intervention and natural processes to restore the precious veld ecosystem.



**BALULE**  
**OUTREACH TRUST**

INSPIRE, ENCOURAGE, EMPOWER!

As per the reminder about the upcoming Pedal Power event in July, please consider entering this epic fund-raiser. The highly successful inaugural ride in July last year generated a substantial sum of money which was donated to the Balule Outreach Trust. The generous amount of R250 000 was accepted with gratitude and enthusiasm to bolster our funding for new projects to be undertaken in the future. Our aim is to assist the likes of entrepreneurs in or around Balule and to hopefully create sustainable businesses which will naturally include additional employment to uplift members of the surrounding rural communities.

As always we thank all members for their ongoing support of BOT and remind all those interested in donating that we issue 18A certificates as tax relief. Further information can be found on our website: [balule.org](http://balule.org)

With immediate effect we will be using our website ([balule.org](http://balule.org)) as a platform for young members of the surrounding communities who have graduated from the Enviro Training Centre to post their CVs in the hope that they will find employment.



# MEMBERS UPDATES

## WEATHER OVERVIEW

Heads up! El Niño is still around, but weakening fast and expected to be gone by early winter. So, while summer's over and El Niño's influence will be minimal, there's something else to keep an eye on.

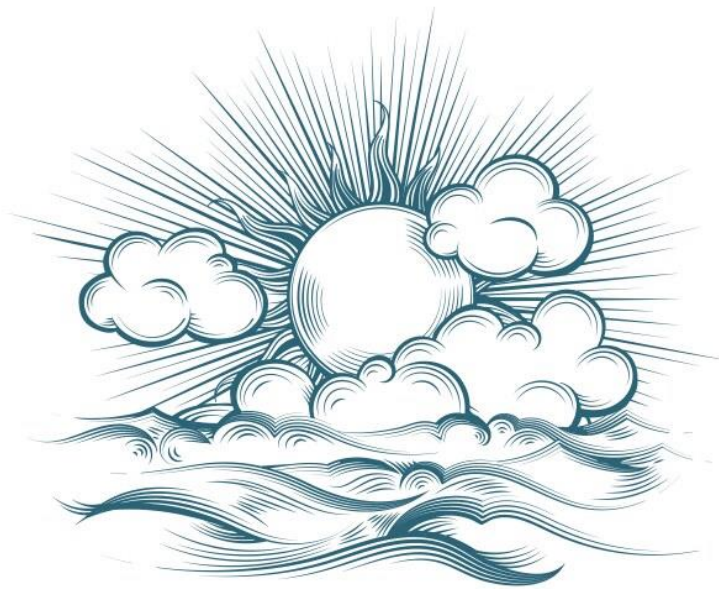
Here's the thing: This is the time of year when "cut-off low" weather systems tend to show up most often, especially from March to May. These storms can bring big impacts, particularly along the southern and south-eastern coasts.

Because of this, it's super important to stay updated on the latest short-term forecasts from the South African Weather Service (SAWS) in addition to the seasonal outlook.

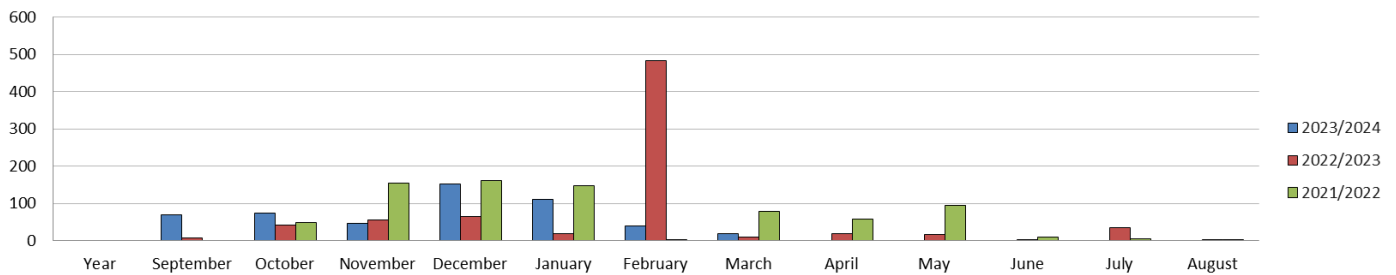
Speaking of the seasonal forecast, things are looking drier than usual for most of the country over the next few months (April-May-June, May-June-July, June-July-August). The good news is some parts of KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Free State might see some above-average rainfall in April-May-June. As for temperatures, expect them to be mostly warmer than usual across the country.

So, while El Niño is on its way out, keep an eye on the weather reports for those potential cut-off lows

Looking at our recent local rainfall on the reserve, we received 40,02mm in February and 19,02mm in March, bringing our season total to 512,36mm compared to 684,9mm last year at the same time.



**ORGR Rainfall Comparison 3 Years**



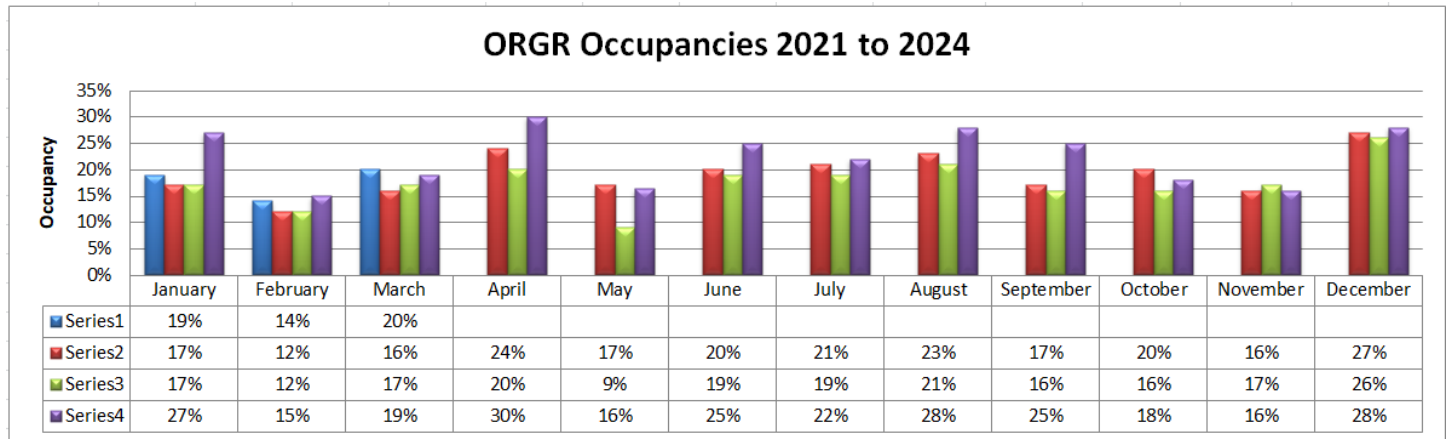
February 2024 Weather Summary - ORGR				March 2024 Weather Summary - ORGR			
	High	Low	Average		High	Low	Average
Temperature	42.3 °C	18.4 °C	27.2 °C	Temperature	41.9 °C	18.8 °C	26.7 °C
Dew Point	24.7 °C	12.7 °C	19.7 °C	Dew Point	23.7 °C	13.1 °C	19.7 °C
Humidity	98 %	28 %	66 %	Humidity	97 %	26 %	68 %
Precipitation	40.02 mm	--	--	Precipitation	19.02 mm	--	--
Wind Speed	23.2 km/h	0.0 km/h	5.5 km/h	Wind Speed	20.4 km/h	0.0 km/h	6.1 km/h
Wind Gust	34.9 km/h	--	8.7 km/h	Wind Gust	29.0 km/h	--	9.4 km/h
Wind Direction	--	--	SE	Wind Direction	--	--	SSE
Pressure	1,013.61 hPa	996.34 hPa	--	Pressure	1,014.90 hPa	996.38 hPa	--

## OCCUPANCIES

Olifants River Game Reserve has been hopping lately! The past two months have been busier than usual for this time of year. In February, things were pretty steady, averaging around 14% occupancy. The busiest day saw a good crowd with 16 units filled, while the quietest day had 7 units occupied.

March really picked up, with the whole month averaging 20% occupancy. Easter weekend was a clear winner, with a whopping 37 units filled! Even the quietest days in March saw 10 units booked, keeping the reserve lively.

Average Occupancies	
2024	18%
2023	18%
2022	17%
2021	22%
2020	22%
2019	14%



## Celestial Spectacle: Unveiling South Africa's Night Sky in April and May 2024

As the curtain falls on the bustling South African summer, a breath-taking display unfolds above – the night sky in April and May 2024 promises a captivating spectacle for stargazers. While the days grow shorter, the nights transform into a celestial canvas teeming with wonders. Let's embark on a journey to explore the highlights of this southern hemisphere extravaganza.

### Dominating the Firmament: The Southern Cross and Co.

South Africa boasts a prime location for appreciating the iconic Southern Cross constellation, Crux. This celestial landmark, easily recognizable by its four bright stars resembling a kite, takes centre stage. Look closely near the base of the Cross for the Jewel Box, a cluster of colourful stars visible with binoculars, where diamonds (hot blue stars) and sapphires (cool red stars) twinkle in a cosmic dance.

### A Dance of Planets:

The pre-dawn hours of April offer a celestial ballet. Mars, the rusty-red planet, and Saturn, the ringed giant, engage in a close encounter. Watch them inch closer to each other each morning, culminating in a breath-taking conjunction on April 10th, where they appear impossibly close. Binoculars will enhance the view, showcasing the contrasting colours of these celestial bodies.



### A Shower of Shooting Stars:

The first week of May brings another celestial treat – the Eta Aquariid meteor shower. While not as prolific as some showers, these meteors, originating from the dust left behind by Comet Halley, streak across the pre-dawn sky, offering a chance to witness the fleeting beauty of "falling stars."

### Beyond the Naked Eye:

For those with telescopes, the wonders multiply. Omega Centauri, a globular cluster nestled in the constellation Centaurus, unveils itself as a dazzling swarm of millions of stars, a testament to the vastness of the cosmos. The Carina Nebula, a stellar nursery, boasts cosmic pillars of gas and dust, where new stars are born.

### Embrace the Ephemeral:

The beauty of the night sky lies not just in the permanent fixtures but also in the fleeting phenomena. As April progresses, the crescent Moon casts an ethereal glow, illuminating the celestial stage. Take advantage of these moonless nights for optimal stargazing.

### A Call to Action:

Olifants, with its minimal light pollution, offers an ideal vantage point for exploring the cosmos. So, grab a blanket, find a dark location away from the lights, and embark on your own celestial adventure. April and May 2024 present a unique opportunity to witness the wonders of the southern night sky – an magically immersive display waiting to be discovered.

### PEDAL POWER 2024(JULY 12TH-14TH)

Calling all adventure seekers and cycling enthusiasts!

Dust off your helmets and get ready for an unforgettable experience! The Olifants River



Game Reserve Pedal Power 2024 is back, and it's your chance to embark on a two-day cycling odyssey through the heart of our stunning reserve.

### Imagine this:

- Pedalling past herds of antelope gracefully grazing in the golden sunrise.
- Spotting zebras galloping alongside your path, their stripes blurring with the thrill of the ride.
- Catching a glimpse of a majestic giraffe peeking through the acacia trees as you conquer a scenic incline.
- This isn't just your average bike ride; it's an immersion into the wild beauty of the Olifants River Game Reserve.

But wait, there's more! Your participation goes beyond an exhilarating adventure. Entry fees directly support our Anti-Poaching Team and Community Programs, ensuring the continued protection of this remarkable ecosystem and its inhabitants.

Ready to join the ride? We know spots fill up fast, so grab your fellow cycling enthusiasts and get ready to make lasting memories! A complete entry form is attached to this email. Be sure to return it to Lourenza by April 19th, 2024. We can't wait to share the magic of the Olifants River Game Reserve with you on this epic adventure!

## APU UNIT SHARPENS SKILLS WITH RIGOROUS TRAINING



The safety and effectiveness of our Anti-Poaching Unit (APU) team is paramount. To ensure they're fully prepared for any situation in the field, we recently invested in a comprehensive five-day training program.

### Elite Instructors Lead the Way

The program was conducted by Bravo Tactical Africa, a renowned training company known for its demanding and realistic scenarios. Leading the team was JC Lambrecht, a highly decorated figure himself.

### JC Lambrecht: A Multifaceted Professional

Lambrecht isn't just a name – he's a powerhouse of expertise. Here's why his leadership was invaluable:

- **Light Heavyweight EFC Champion:** Lambrecht's extensive combat experience translates directly to tactical training. He understands the importance of focus, discipline, and split-second decision-making under pressure.
- **First Aid Trauma Specialist:** Beyond combat readiness, Lambrecht possesses critical medical knowledge. His trauma first aid expertise equips the APU team to handle potential injuries in remote locations, potentially saving lives.
- **Top-Tier Firearms Instructor:** Recognized as one of the country's best firearms instructors, Lambrecht ensures the APU team's proficiency with various weapons. This guarantees they can effectively neutralize threats while minimizing risk.



### Pushing Limits, Building Champions

The training program put our APU team through their paces. Lambrecht's demanding drills and simulated scenarios tested their physical and mental fortitude. Their unwavering performance throughout the program is a testament to their dedication and commitment.

### Continuous Investment for Success

Our continued investment in training and development reflects our unwavering commitment to excellence. By providing the APU team with the best possible resources, we empower them to be the most effective unit in the APNR. This, in turn, strengthens our efforts to protect wildlife and combat poaching activities.

## THE FINAL WORD

As the days shorten and the bushveld awakens with the beauty of Autumn, we at Olifants River Game Reserve bid you a fond farewell for this month. May the coming days be filled with sunshine and the promise of new adventures. We hope this newsletter has painted a vivid picture of the magic that unfolds within our reserve, a place where the spirit of the Greater Kruger ecosystem thrives.

In the words of the renowned South African author Laurens van der Post, *"The bushveld is a living thing. It breathes, it grows, it dies. It speaks a language that can be learned."* We invite you to come experience this language for yourself. Olifants River Game Reserve awaits your visit, a place to immerse yourself in the untamed beauty of the African wilderness, encounter unforgettable wildlife, and forge memories that will resonate long after your departure. We look forward to seeing you all back at our corner of paradise soon.

*Warmest regards!*

***Nick and the Olifants River Game Reserve Team***

