

### Quick Black Mamba Facts

**Fast and Furious:** Black mambas are the fastest snakes in Africa, slithering at speeds of up to 16-19 km/h on smooth surfaces.

**Both Arboreal and Terrestrial:** Black mambas are comfortable living in trees and on the ground. They're excellent climbers and agile hunters.

**Daytime Dwellers:** Unlike many nocturnal snakes, black mambas are active during the day, basking in the sun and searching for prey.

**Black Isn't Always Black:** While their name suggests a solid black colour, black mambas can range from dark olive-grey to a brownish black. Their underbellies are typically lighter.

**Fearsome Reputation:** Black mambas are known for their aggressive behaviour when threatened. However, they generally prefer to escape if possible.

**Fangs for the Memories:** Their fangs are relatively long, reaching up to 6.5 mm allowing them to inject a large amount of venom with each bite.

**Egg Layers:** Black mambas lay clutches of 6-25 eggs, which they abandon after laying. The young hatchlings are independent from birth and must fend for themselves.

**Widespread in Africa:** Black mambas are found in sub-Saharan Africa, inhabiting savannas, woodlands, and rocky areas.

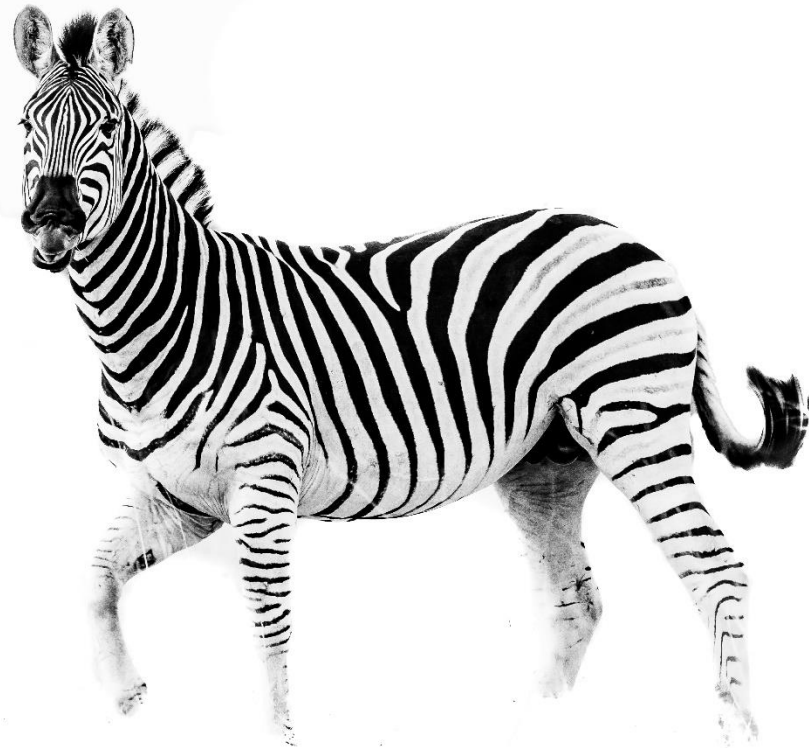
**Not Immune to Their Own Venom:** Black mambas, like all snakes, are not immune to their own venom. A severe bite from another black mamba can be fatal.

# NEWSLETTER

July 2024 Issue

## DEAR OLIFANTS FAMILY

As the year reaches its halfway point, the crisp mornings and cool evenings settle over the Olifants River Game Reserve, ushering in the magic of winter in the bushveld. The once vibrant greens of the bushveld give way to a myriad golden hues, and the air takes on a refreshing dryness. This season brings a unique charm to our reserve, with wildlife encounters often more frequent as animals gather around water sources, and the untamed beauty of the landscape shines through in a new light. Welcome to the July edition of our newsletter, where we invite you to delve into the wonders of the Olifants River Game Reserve during this captivating-time of year.



## ORGR GAME DRIVE

May and June at Olifants River Game Reserve have been a wildlife wonderland, offering sightings that will leave you breathless. Prepare to be dazzled by the sheer abundance of incredible creatures that call this reserve home! Leopards have stolen the spotlight this season, gracing us with their presence almost daily across the reserve. These elusive cats, known for their stealth and power, have been spotted stalking prey, lounging in the dappled sunlight, or perched majestically on ancient termite mounds. Be it a fleeting glimpse or a prolonged encounter, a leopard sighting is an unforgettable experience.

While lion sightings haven't been quite as common as the leopards, the encounters we have had have been truly magnificent. Every lion sighting is a reminder of the raw power and beauty that defines these apex predators. The recently released pack of wild dogs has become a captivating addition to the reserve's wildlife offering. Their energetic hunting forays, painted ears flapping in the wind, and the intricate social dynamics within the pack are a sight to behold. Spotting these endangered animals is a privilege, offering a glimpse into the remarkable resilience of nature. The reserve has been teeming with elephants this past month. Witnessing a large herd thundering across the bushveld, dust swirling around their powerful legs, is a truly awe-inspiring experience. These gentle giants, both young and old, add an undeniable majesty to the landscape.

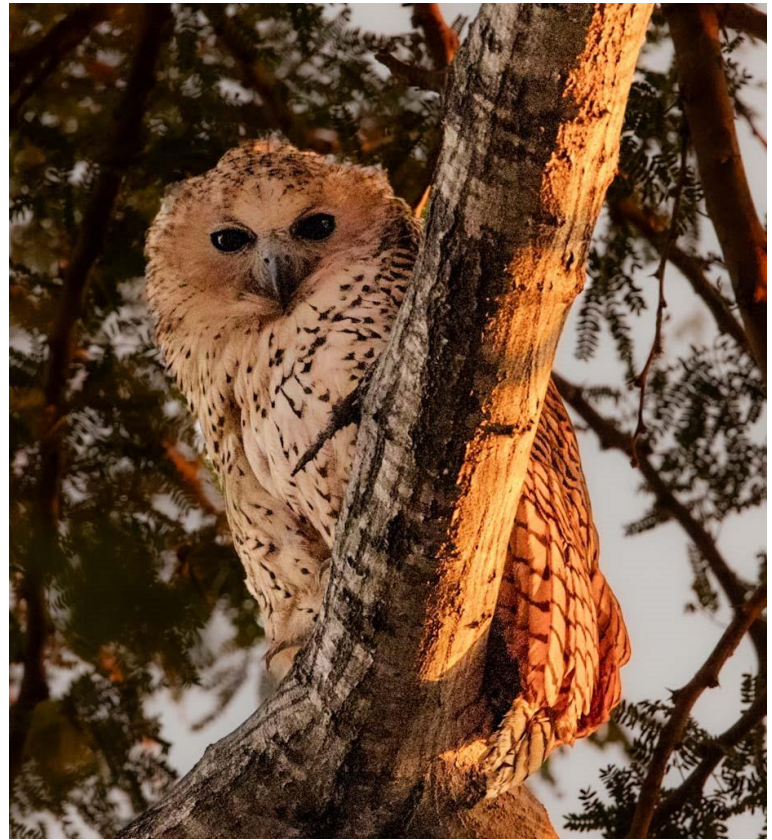
A recent highlight for our members has been the sighting of the elusive Pel's fishing owl along Pels Loop. This magnificent bird, with its piercing eyes, is a true gem of the landscape. Spotting this specialized predator adds an extra layer of uniqueness to any game drive.



## **CREATURE FEATURE: THE MASTER OF THE MARSH: UNVEILING THE SECRETS OF THE PEL'S FISHING OWL**

In the heart of Africa, where the bushveld meets the stillness of permanent rivers and lakes, resides a master predator – the Pel's fishing owl (*Scotopelia peli*). This magnificent bird, shrouded in mystery, is a marvel of adaptation, perfectly equipped to reign supreme in its aquatic domain.

Unlike most owls, the Pel's fishing owl boasts a surprisingly un-owl-like appearance. Its large, ginger-rufous body is barred with dusky streaks and chevrons, providing excellent camouflage amidst the reeds and overhanging branches. Standing tall at 51-63 cm, with a wingspan reaching up to 153 cm, it's one of the largest owl species in the world. But its true distinction lies in its exceptional adaptations for a life spent perched on the cusp of danger – the water's edge.



Unlike its terrestrial brethren that rely on silent flight and exceptional hearing to locate prey, the Pel's fishing owl utilizes a keen sense of sight. Its large eyes, positioned frontally on its head, offer excellent binocular vision, allowing it to pinpoint fish rippling the water's surface with inimitable accuracy. Furthermore, unlike most owls with fully feathered feet, the Pel's fishing owl has minimal feathering on its toes and tarsus. This adaptation minimizes water resistance and allows for silent, stealthy movements as it wades into the shallows. Rough spicules on the soles of its feet provide exceptional grip, preventing it from slipping on wet rocks or logs while hunting.

The Pel's fishing owl's diet consists primarily of fish, frogs, and occasionally small water birds. Its hunting technique is swift and decisive. With laser focus, it locates unsuspecting prey. In a sudden burst of movement, it launches itself from its perch, silently snatching its chosen meal with its powerful talons. The catch is then either drowned or carried back to a safe location for consumption.

Despite its formidable hunting prowess, the Pel's fishing owl faces significant threats. Habitat loss due to water pollution, damming of rivers, and the encroachment of human settlements pose a major danger to its populations. Additionally, competition for food resources from introduced fish species and persecution by fishermen who view them as a threat to their catch, further endanger these magnificent birds. Conservation efforts are underway to protect this rare and revered bird. Habitat restoration projects are being implemented to ensure the health of its aquatic environment. Public education initiatives aim to raise awareness about the importance of this apex predator and its role in maintaining healthy ecosystems.

The Pel's fishing owl is a testament to the remarkable diversity and adaptability of life in Africa. By understanding its unique biology and the challenges it faces, we can ensure that this master of the marsh continues to reign supreme in its watery domain for generations to come.

# CONSERVATION

## Wild Dog Update: Thriving in Freedom's Footsteps

Olifants River Game Reserve's Wild Dog Pack Soars!

We're thrilled to share a positive update on the pack of 16 Wild Dogs released into the Olifants River Game Reserve in April after their extended stay in our boma. These remarkable canines, hailing from KwaZulu-Natal, continue to thrive in their new home!

**From Boma to Bushveld:**

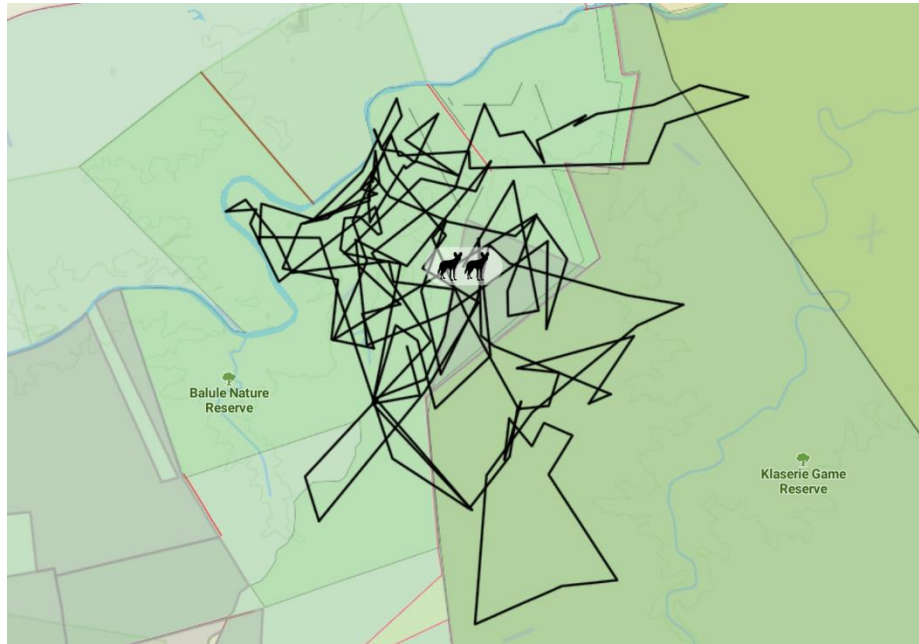
Following their capture due to challenges in their previous reserve, the boma served as a sanctuary for the pack. Here, they acclimated to their surroundings and received the care they needed. Our dedicated team provided for their physical and psychological well-being, ensuring a smooth transition back into the wild.

**A Testament to Resilience:**

The Wild Dogs have not only adapted to the ORGR but have also chosen to remain within our immediate area. This loyalty to their new territory showcases their remarkable resilience and their growing comfort with their surroundings.

**The Freedom They Deserve:**

The original plan to release them into the northern Kruger National Park did not work out. However, their decision to stay close to the ORGR suggests they have found a new home at ORGR and Balule. They have access to the Greater Kruger area and can roam the wilderness as they feel fit.



**A Beacon of Hope:**

The success story of these Wild Dogs embodies the core values of ORGR. Their journey highlights the delicate balance between species conservation and individual animal welfare. The dedication of our team in providing them with a safe haven and the subsequent flourishing of the pack serves as a beacon of hope for future conservation efforts.

# Historic Rhino Rewilding Takes Place in Greater Kruger National Park

**Balule Nature Reserve** is thrilled to announce its participation in a groundbreaking conservation effort – the reintroduction of 32 white rhinos into our surrounding area.

These rhinos come from a population acquired by African Parks last year. As part of the "Rhino Rewild" initiative, a total of 120 rhinos were reintroduced to reserves along Kruger's western boundary.

## Balule's Role in the Rewilding

Our dedicated team played a vital role in this project:

- **Dehorning:** To enhance the safety of the rhinos, reserve staff assisted with the dehorning process before their release.
- **Security:** Our ORGR Anti-Poaching Unit provided crucial protection services during the translocation convoy. Their vigilance is essential for the continued success of this rewilding effort.
- **Monitoring:** We'll be closely monitoring the health and well-being of the rhinos as they acclimate to their new home.

## The Release Process

The rhinos were released into a secure boma, a temporary enclosure, where they could adjust to their surroundings before being allowed to roam freely within the reserve. During this acclimatization period, they'll be monitored for any post-translocation issues. The animals were released into the open system after the climatization process was complete after a couple of days.

## Be Aware: Sharing Information

As part of the agreement with African Parks, we kindly ask that you refrain from sharing any specific details about the release location on social media. Please share the official press releases from GKEPF or African Parks instead. You can find posts from these two organisations on Instagram or Facebook.

## Welcome Home, Rhinos!

The reintroduction of these magnificent creatures marks a significant step forward for rhino conservation in the Greater Kruger. Balule Nature Reserve is honoured to be a part of this collaborative effort and looks forward to watching these rhinos thrive in their new home.



## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Why are we receiving rhinos?

Reintroductions like this one are crucial for restoring rhino populations and biodiversity. The Greater Kruger is a perfect habitat for white rhinos, and the private reserves have a proven track record of successful rhino protection.

### 2. What are the risks?

Translocations involve some degree of risk, but experienced professionals minimize these risks through careful planning and monitoring. The rhinos will be closely monitored and receive any necessary veterinary care.

### 3. What are the opportunities?

- **Boosting Rhino Populations:** This project aims to significantly increase the white rhino population in the Greater Kruger.
- **Restoring Ecological Benefits:** Rhinos play a vital role in the ecosystem. Their grazing habits benefit other animals and maintain healthy grasslands.
- **Rewarding Anti-Poaching Efforts:** The success of this reintroduction is a testament to the tireless work of anti-poaching teams in the Greater Kruger.

### 4. Why are we prepared to take the risks?

The fertile grazing land and effective anti-poaching measures within the reserve provide the best possible chance for these rhinos to thrive and contribute to the long-term health of the species.



# REACHING OUT

## Winter Warmth

The month of June has seen supreme generosity on the part of philanthropic individuals and groups who worked together to bring comfort to many youngsters in the Sigagule area.

Bags of Love in Johannesburg received a total of 11 brand new wind cheaters for children and 60 new blankets and selected the S.A.M.E. Foundation in Sigagule as the recipient of these “winter warmers” for they were incredibly grateful and excited to share these with the most needy in the area. The sheer delight of the lucky recipients is evident in these pictures!

A word of thanks, too, to Elsabe Egan and to Matthew Gooding for bringing up the donations to the reserve to ensure the timeous distribution of these items before it got too cold!



## BALULE OUTREACH TRUST

BOT is delighted to announce that it will again be sponsoring three students selected from the Acornhoek and/or Phalaborwa areas, to attend the next Guiding course at Enviro Training Africa. Shirley-Anne Berretta and her team have interviewed the candidates and singled out the most suitable young bursary participants, namely Lebone Seoke, Gwendoline Seoke and Khenso Madlhophe, who will begin their training in July.

As always, we thank those members (and friends) who so loyally support the Balule Outreach Trust which is continually seeking and implementing ways to bring upliftment to the surrounding communities. Comfort, hope, enlightenment, education and opportunity are vital components in the work that we do and we could not achieve half of what we do without the support of you all! Please visit our website : <https://baluleoutreach.org> for more information. Our bank account details: FNB, Bryanston Branch, Account number 62336787877



**BALULE**  
OUTREACH TRUST

# MEMBERS UPDATES

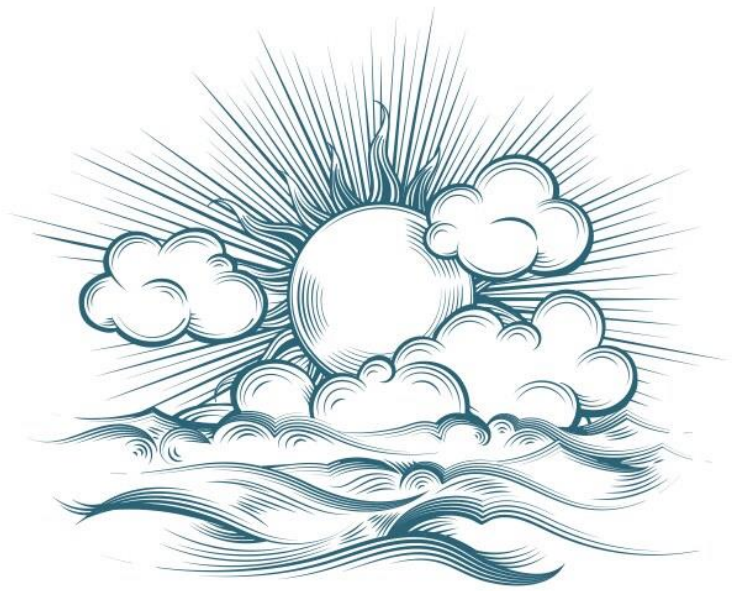
## WEATHER OVERVIEW

El Niño's been hanging around lately (think warmer ocean waters), but it's on its way out and is expected to be neutral by mid to late winter. Since summer's done, this El Niño system won't have much impact on us.

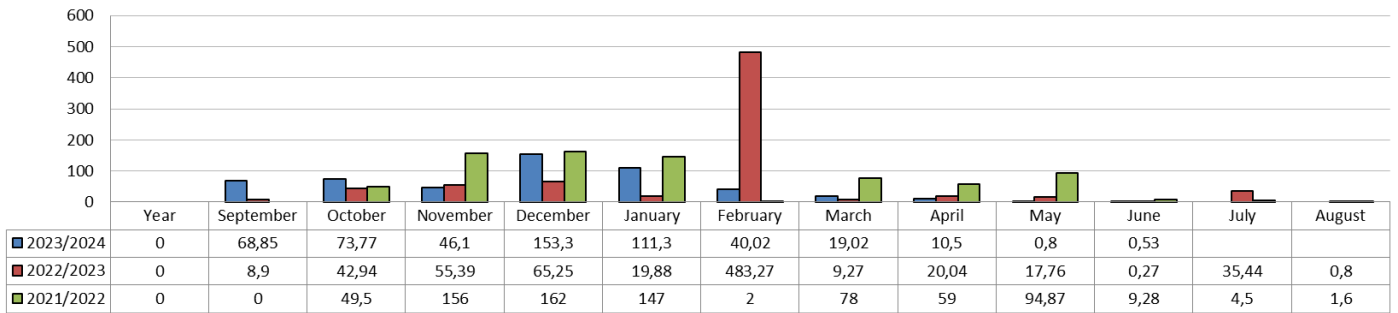
Winter weather is tricky to predict way in advance, especially for the southern and southeastern coastal areas. These areas tend to get the brunt of whatever winter throws our way. Because of this, it's super important to check the South African Weather Service (SAWS) short-term forecasts regularly to stay on top of things.

Speaking of SAWS, their forecast for the next few months (June-August, July-September, August-October) is looking drier than usual for most of the country. On the temperature side of things, expect it to be mostly warmer than average nationwide.

Looking at our recent local rainfall on the reserve, we received 10,5mm in April, 0,8mm in May and 0,53mm in June.



ORGR Rainfall Comparison 3 Years

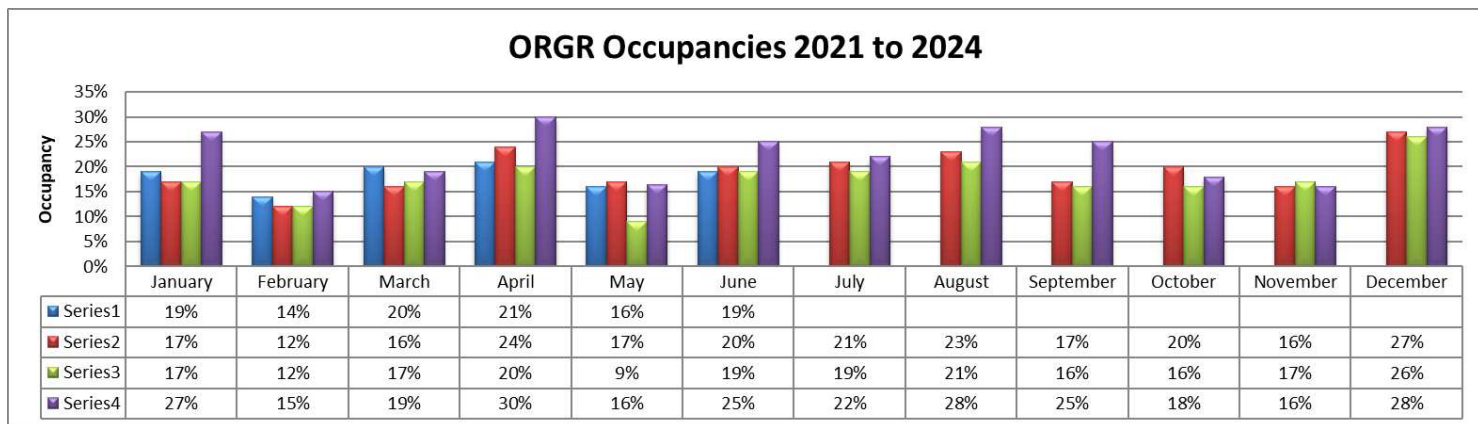


May 2024 Weather Summary - ORGR	High	Low	Average	June 2024 Weather Summary - ORGR	High	Low	Average
Temperature	37.2 °C	9.3 °C	21.8 °C	Temperature	33.8 °C	5.6 °C	18.7 °C
Dew Point	19.4 °C	3.7 °C	13.3 °C	Dew Point	19.8 °C	-4.5 °C	8.7 °C
Humidity	96 %	17 %	63 %	Humidity	97 %	11 %	57 %
Precipitation	0.8 mm	--	--	Precipitation	0.5 mm	--	--
Wind Speed	18.0 km/h	0.0 km/h	3.5 km/h	Wind Speed	26.6 km/h	0.0 km/h	5.6 km/h
Wind Gust	28.0 km/h	--	5.3 km/h	Wind Gust	38.0 km/h	--	7.9 km/h
Wind Direction	--	--	SE	Wind Direction	--	--	South
Pressure	1,017.95 hPa	1,002.37 hPa	--	Pressure	1,022.96 hPa	999.19 hPa	-

## OCCUPANCIES

April saw a healthy average occupancy of 21% of the reserve's 85 units. May dipped slightly to 16%, and June recovered a bit to 19% on average. June also offered a range of experiences, with some nights as quiet as 8 occupied units, while other nights saw 21 units bustling with members eager to explore the reserve.

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



## Southern Skies in July: A Celestial Spectacle Awaits

As July unfolds in the southern hemisphere, the night sky transforms into a breathtaking display of celestial wonders. From the majestic dance of planets to the fleeting glimpse of a meteor shower, this month offers a captivating experience for astronomy enthusiasts of all levels. So, prepare to be dazzled by the hidden gems that July's southern skies have to offer.

### A Jovian Jewel: Jupiter Takes Centre Stage

Dominating the night sky throughout July, Jupiter reigns supreme. Rising high in the east during the evening hours, its brilliance outshines most stars, casting a soft, white glow. This is a prime opportunity for both naked-eye and telescopic observations. Through a telescope, Jupiter's swirling cloud bands and its fascinating moons, Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto, become visible, offering a glimpse into the dynamic nature of our solar system.

### A Farewell to Saturn: The Ringed Wonder Departs

While Jupiter remains a constant presence through July, Saturn bids farewell to the evening sky. As the month progresses, Saturn sinks lower towards the western horizon, its rings becoming increasingly difficult to discern. By the end of July, this magnificent planet will disappear from view, setting the stage for its return in the pre-dawn hours later in the year.



### A Dance of the Red Planet: Mars on the Move

While not as prominent as Jupiter, Mars continues to be a captivating sight throughout July. Visible in the

southeastern sky during the early evening hours, the red planet appears to be slowly drifting eastward relative to the background stars. For those with telescopes, the polar ice caps and some surface markings of Mars might be visible under good observing conditions.

### **A Celestial Encounter: The Moon Meets Jupiter and Mars**

July brings a special treat for skywatchers as the Moon embarks on a celestial ballet with Jupiter and Mars. During the second half of the month, the Moon will appear to be close to these planets on consecutive nights, creating a beautiful three-body alignment. This is a fantastic opportunity to capture stunning astrophotography or simply appreciate the beauty of these celestial bodies in close proximity.

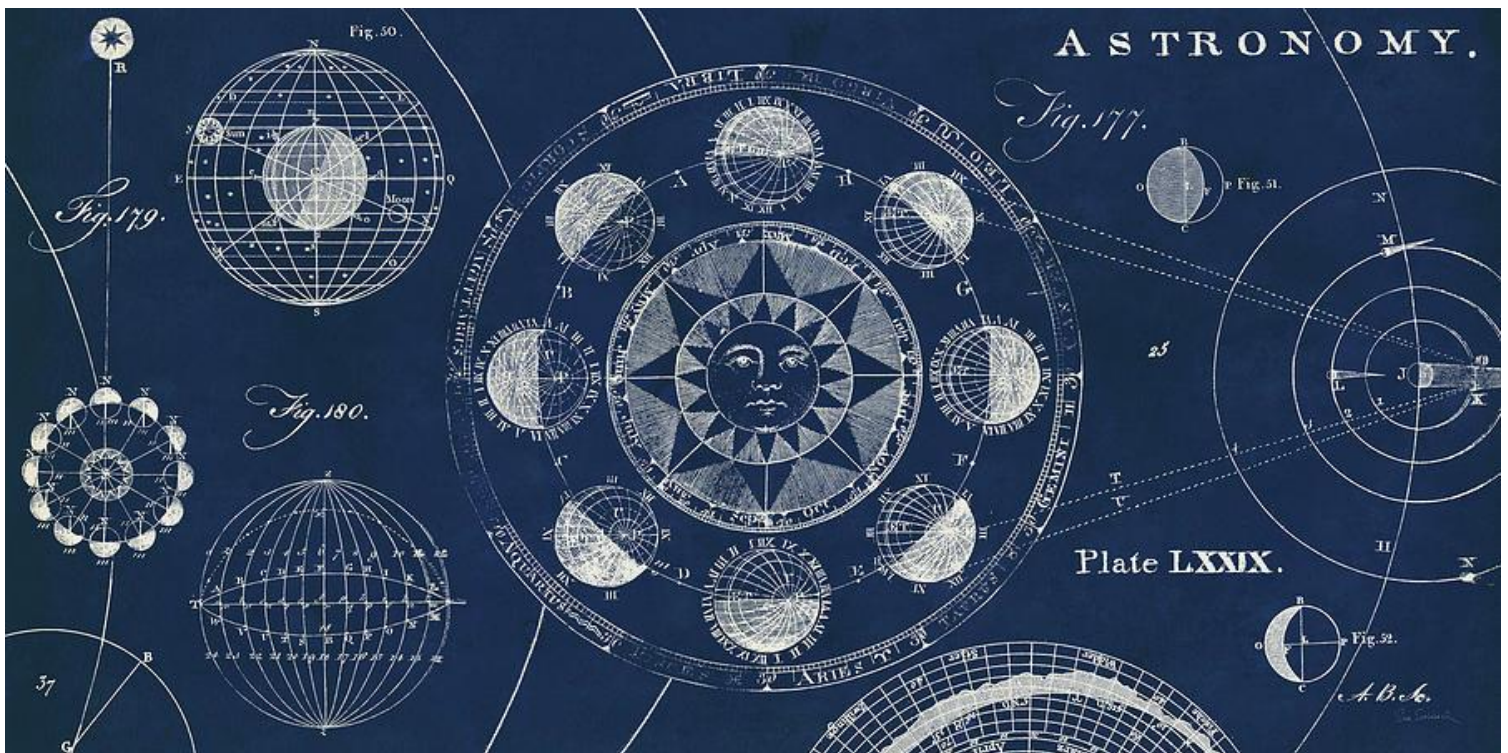
### **A Fleeting Display: The Southern Delta Aquariid Meteor Shower**

While not the most prolific meteor shower, the Southern Delta Aquariid meteor shower peaks in the pre-dawn hours of July 31st. This shower originates from comet 96P/Machholz and can produce up to 20-25 meteors per hour under ideal observing conditions. However, the waning crescent Moon will wash out some of the fainter meteors, so patience and a dark observing location are key.

### **Milky Way Majesty: Unveiling the Galactic Core**

As the winter chill deepens in the southern hemisphere, July offers a spectacular view of the Milky Way galaxy. Stretching across the night sky from the north-northwest to the south-southeast, this band of light represents the vast collection of stars, gas, and dust that is our home galaxy. On clear nights, with minimal light pollution, the Milky Way's central bulge, rich in stars and dust, becomes visible, offering a glimpse into the heart of our galactic neighbourhood.

July's southern skies are a captivating tapestry of celestial wonders. From the dazzling brilliance of Jupiter to the fleeting beauty of the meteor shower, each night offers a unique opportunity to explore the vastness of the universe. So, embrace the cool night air, turn your gaze skyward, and be mesmerized by the celestial spectacle that awaits.



## ETHICAL GAME VIEWING



### **Nocturnal Viewing:**

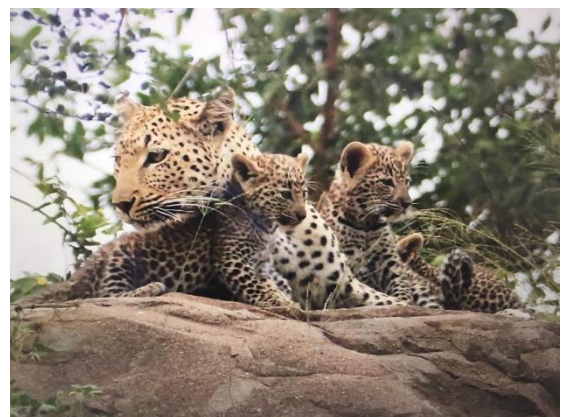
The African night sky, a breathtaking tapestry of stars, beckons us to explore the hidden world of nocturnal wildlife. However, venturing into this realm necessitates a deep respect for its inhabitants. Responsible game viewing at night becomes paramount, requiring a commitment to minimize our impact and ensure the well-being of the animals we encounter.

Observing nocturnal animals like lions and leopards requires understanding their natural rhythms. These predators become most active after dusk, hunting under the cloak of darkness. While spotlights can reveal these magnificent creatures, responsible members at ORGR must adhere to a strict red-filter policy. Red light is less disruptive to animal vision, allowing for observation without compromising their ability to hunt or navigate. Blinding white light, on the other hand, can disorient and stress animals, hindering their natural behaviour.

Not all animals are nocturnal. Cheetahs and Wild Dogs are primarily diurnal, thriving in the daylight hours. Exposing them to artificial lights disrupts their sleep patterns and can negatively impact their hunting success. Ethical game viewing dictates respecting these natural rhythms. Nighttime should be dedicated to observing nocturnal species, leaving cheetah and Wild Dog encounters for the daytime when their activity levels are highest. (No spotlights or spotlights with red filters on these species). Please do not call in Wild Dog or Cheetah on the radio after dark.

### **Sensitivity Around Cubs: A Constant Consideration**

The presence of young cubs, whether bathed in sunlight or moonlight, demands a heightened level of sensitivity. Predators with cubs are naturally more vigilant, easily startled by unfamiliar lights and sounds. Members should navigate these encounters with care, maintaining a safe distance, minimizing spotlighting, and avoiding sudden movements that could stress the mother or frighten the young. Our presence should never come at the cost of disrupting the crucial bond between mother and offspring.



## Viewing the Pels Fishing owl

With the Pel's being sighted recently again more regularly let's ensure it sticks around. The Pel's Fishing Owl, is endangered species and relies upon exceptional night vision for hunting. For these precious creatures, responsible game viewing at night and even during the day means being sensitive around their habitat and not putting too much pressure on them. We should not disturb the bird between 0900 and 1500 during the day and Should we have a bird on a nest, the sighting needs to be closed. We are fortunate to have these unique birds grace our riverfront, and it's our responsibility to ensure this doesn't change.

## Ethical Decision-Making: A Collaborative Effort

Ethical game viewing is a shared responsibility. Members who discover sensitive sightings, day or night, need to assess the situation and make the correct call. This could involve closing a sighting entirely or limiting vehicle movements to minimize disturbance. Should a sighting be sensitive, no more than three vehicles should be permitted and this must be controlled by the unit in charge of the sighting. Never underestimate the importance of seeking guidance from ORGR Management staff. Their expertise allows them to advise on specific sightings, ensuring the well-being of the animals while providing visitors with a memorable experience.

Let us become more responsible observers, witnessing the natural wonders of the reserve unfold with respect and awe. By working together, we can ensure the continued harmony between humans and the wild wonders that call Olifants River Game Reserve home.

## SEPTIC TANK TREATMENT – NEW PRODUCT

We would like to introduce a new product that will be available in the ORGR very soon to ensure your septic tank system are healthy and functioning properly. Baczyme Sewage Power is an excellent biological solution for Septic tanks. The powder derivatives of this product incorporate activation nutrients which aids in growth of the bacteria under nutrient deficient or nutrient lanced conditions. We have found this product be a lot more cost effective than the old schachets.

As a ready to use product applications include:

- ▶ The biological treatment of sewage waste
- ▶ The biological treatment of effluents generated by industry
  - ▶ Septic tank treatment
  - ▶ Grey-water system treatment
  - ▶ Waterless and portable toilets
- ▶ Rehabilitation and treatment of pit latrine systems



<b>Solids breakdown</b>	✓
<b>Treats COD</b>	✓
<b>Removes Phosphate</b>	✓
<b>Removes Nitrate</b>	✓
<b>Removes Nitrite</b>	✓
<b>Removes Ammonium</b>	✓

If you are interested in the product to use at your unit, please check in with the Office.

## WELCOME TO THE FAMILY, COLIN AND TANYA!

We are thrilled to announce the arrival of two new members becoming part of the Olifants River Game Reserve (ORGR) family at the beginning of August! Please join us in welcoming Colin Wiseman (our new Technical Services Manager) and Tanya Wiseman (our new Member Services Manager).

Colin and Tanya's story began in Amanzimtoti, KwaZulu-Natal, where they met in 2000 and married in 2004. Their spirit of adventure led them on a two-year working holiday in the UK, where their son Rayne was born. Upon returning to South Africa, Tanya pursued a diverse career path while earning a BCom degree from UNISA. Colin, meanwhile, thrived as a self-employed individual in the construction industry.

In 2009, seeking new opportunities, they relocated to Gauteng, where Tanya, for the past twelve years, honed her skills as an Operations Manager and Colin, for the past eight years, excelled as a Facilities Manager for a large estate. With Rayne set to graduate with a BSc in Applied Mathematics and Physical Science in late 2024, they felt ready for a captivating new challenge in a remote location.

Both Colin and Tanya are deeply passionate about the outdoors, nature, wildlife, and environmental conservation. Their love for these values is evident in the many family holidays spent exploring game parks like Kruger, Umfolozi, Hluhluwe, and the mesmerizing wetlands of St. Lucia.

This great team shares a strong work ethic, prioritizes family values, and believes in a hands-on management approach. The opportunity to join the ORGR team resonated deeply with them, and they eagerly look forward to making significant contributions in their respective roles.

We are confident that Colin and Tanya's expertise, experience, and passion will be invaluable assets to ORGR. We know they're excited to meet everyone, forge lasting relationships, and embrace a lifestyle surrounded by the wonders of the reserve.



## THE FINAL WORD

As we bid farewell to June and look towards the promise of Spring, we take a moment to express our heartfelt gratitude to Lourenza and Errol for their years of dedicated service to the Olifants River Game Reserve family. Their contributions have been invaluable, and we wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

And as we turn the page, let's not forget the incredible privilege we have of calling this place home. Nestled along the banks of the Olifants River, ORGR forms part of the expansive Greater Kruger open system, teeming with diverse wildlife and breathtaking landscapes. Remember, every game drive, every sunrise over the reserve, is a testament to the magic that surrounds us. Here's to another exciting month of discovery and connection at ORGR!

*"The bushveld whispers secrets on the wind, stories etched in ancient stone. Beneath a canopy of stars, life unfolds in a rhythm both fierce and serene. Here, where time slows and hearts beat wild, the soul finds solace in the boundless embrace of the wilderness."*

*Warmest regards!*

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

