

# NEWSLETTER

November 2024 Issue

## DEAR OLIFANTS FAMILY

Summer is in full swing at Olifants River Game Reserve! The air is thick with humidity, the sun beats down, and the first rains have brought a welcome relief to our parched landscape. As the bushveld begins to awaken, a vibrant tapestry of green emerges, and the return of migrant birds fills the air with their songs. Get ready to experience the magic of the bushveld in full bloom!



*"In the fierce embrace of a thunderstorm, nature's fury gives way to renewal. The violent winds may strip the land bare, but from the depths of the earth, new life will spring forth, a testament to the enduring cycle of destruction and rebirth."*

### Quick African Rock Python Facts

**Size Matters:** The African rock python is Africa's largest snake, capable of reaching lengths of over 6 meters and weighing up to 50 kilograms.

**Silent Killers:** These non-venomous constrictors rely on their powerful muscles to subdue prey. They coil around their victims, squeezing until they suffocate.

**Heat-Seeking Sensors:** African rock pythons have heat-sensitive pits on their upper lips that allow them to detect warm-blooded prey in the dark.

**Maternal Instincts:** Female African rock pythons are dedicated mothers. They coil around their eggs to incubate them, regulating their temperature and protecting them from predators.

**Diverse Diet:** These opportunistic feeders have a varied diet, ranging from small rodents to large mammals like impala and warthogs.

**Aquatic Prowess:** Despite their size, African rock pythons are surprisingly good swimmers and often hunt in water bodies.

**Camouflaged Hunters:** Their mottled brown and yellow coloration provides excellent camouflage in their natural habitat, allowing them to ambush unsuspecting prey.

**Long Lifespan:** African rock pythons can live for over 20 years in captivity.

**Solitary Existence:** These snakes are solitary creatures and only come together during mating season.

**Cultural Significance:** In many African cultures, the African rock python is revered as a symbol of power and strength. It often appears in folklore and mythology.

## ORGR GAME DRIVE

The dry season is a time of abundance at Olifants River Game Reserve, and September and October were no exception. The parched landscape concentrates the animals, making them easier to spot. As always, we were blessed with incredible sightings, and this year was no different. Lions were frequently seen throughout the reserve and Leopard sightings were also a daily occurrence, with many individuals being seen on the prowl.

General game was also seen in good numbers, including kudu, waterbuck, wildebeest, giraffes, zebras, and impalas. The migrant birds were also starting to arrive, adding to the diversity of wildlife. One particularly special sighting was an African Finfoot seen close to the causeway. This rare bird is a shy and elusive species, so it was a real treat to see it in close proximity! Elephant numbers were very high during this time, as they congregated around the waterholes. Buffalo herds have also made an appearance, often seen grazing in the open plains.

Overall, September and October were an excellent time to visit Olifants River Game Reserve. The dry conditions made it easy to spot wildlife, and the diversity of species was impressive. We look forward to another exciting season ahead!



## CREATURE FEATURE: THE AFRICAN BUFFALO: A FORCE OF NATURE

The African buffalo, a formidable herbivore, is one of Africa's "Big Five" game animals. Its imposing stature, powerful build, and unpredictable temperament have earned it a reputation as a dangerous creature. Yet, this magnificent animal plays a vital role in the African ecosystem.

### Physical Characteristics

African buffalo are large, robust animals with short, sturdy legs and a massive head. Both males and females possess large, curved horns that can grow to impressive lengths. Their thick, dark brown or black coats provide protection from the harsh sun and potential predators.



### Social Structure

African buffalo are highly social animals, living in large herds of hundreds or even thousands. These groups are typically led by a dominant bull, who defends the herd from predators and rivals. There is a complex social hierarchy, with dominant individuals exerting control over subordinates.

### Behaviour and Ecology

These magnificent beasts are primarily grazers, feeding on grasses and other herbaceous plants. They are often found in areas with abundant water sources, as they require regular access to water. During the dry season, they may migrate long distances in search of sustenance.

Despite their imposing size and strength, African buffalo are vulnerable to predation by lions. However, they are formidable defenders, and a wounded or threatened buffalo can be extremely dangerous. When attacked by lions, buffalo will often form a defensive circle, protecting those within the herd that may be targets.

### Conservation Status

While African buffalo populations have recovered from historical declines, they still face threats such as habitat loss, poaching, and disease. Conservation efforts are underway to protect these giants of the veld and ensure their survival for future generations.

### Interesting Facts about the African Buffalo

This truly iconic African animal and its conservation is essential for the health of African ecosystems. By understanding and appreciating these magnificent creatures, we can work to protect them for generations to come. They are:

- Known for their unpredictable behaviour, which can render them a threat to humans.
- Capable of running at speeds of up to 55km per hour.
- Noisy, with individuals grunting, snorting, and bellowing.
- Important ecosystem engineers, shaping the landscape through their grazing and trampling activities.
- A significant food source for large predators like lions and hyenas.

# CONSERVATION

## A Rhino's Fight for Survival

The stillness of the night was shattered by a desperate plea. A young white rhino calf, barely three weeks old, had been viciously attacked by hyenas. Its life hung by a thread. The sighting of this injured baby rhino was promptly reported to us by our members.

Our dedicated team sprang into action. Armed with a drone, they scoured the area around of Nkonkoni Dam, searching for the landscape and soon the drone's eye in the sky revealed a heart-wrenching scene! The tiny battered and bruised victim was limping badly and not moving well at all.

With urgency, we coordinated with veterinarians and wildlife authorities. The following morning, we returned to the scene, determined to rescue the fragile creature. Now weak and vulnerable, the baby was once again located, using the drone. We called in the Vet team who arrived by helicopter to immobilise the mother whilst we assessed the calf. Due to the extreme infections on her wound, she would not have survived another

day in the wild – and a quick decision to transport her to the Care for Wild Rhino orphanage saved her life. Upon arrival, the severity of the calf's injuries became apparent. Deep, infected bite wounds marred its legs, and a broken hind leg added to its suffering. Under the watchful eye of experienced caregivers, the calf began its arduous journey to recovery. With each passing day, it showed remarkable resilience, responding well to treatment. As the wounds healed and strength returned, hope kindled within the rescue team.

The ultimate goal is to rehabilitate the calf and release it back into the wild, where it belongs. The team remains optimistic, and we will keep you updated on this inspiring tale of survival. The mother is doing well and is still regularly seen on ORGR.



## Very dry conditions persist

The ongoing dry conditions at Olifants River Game Reserve are taking a toll on the wildlife and the landscape. This season's reduced rainfall has led to diminished water sources and sparse vegetation, impacting the body condition of some animal species.

To mitigate the increased fire risk, members are urged to exercise extreme caution when handling open flames. Please ensure that all braai fires are completely extinguished before leaving the area. Unattended fires can quickly spread, posing a serious threat to the reserve's delicate ecosystem.

## ORGR K9 Update

We're excited to announce the expansion of our K9 tracking team! To ensure continuous operational capability, we've welcomed a new tracking dog puppy to the family. While it will take a couple of years for this young pup to become fully operational, this proactive step guarantees that our team will always have two skilled tracking dogs ready to assist.

Fannie Mampa, a dedicated team member with a passion for K9s, will be the proud handler of this new puppy, which he has named Nala. This role will provide him with valuable experience and personal growth, strengthening our follow-up team.

## Biting Dog Development

Nyx (Dutch Shepherd), our promising biting dog, is now six months old and progressing rapidly under Tristan's expert training. We anticipate that Nyx will become a vital asset to our follow-up team in the future.

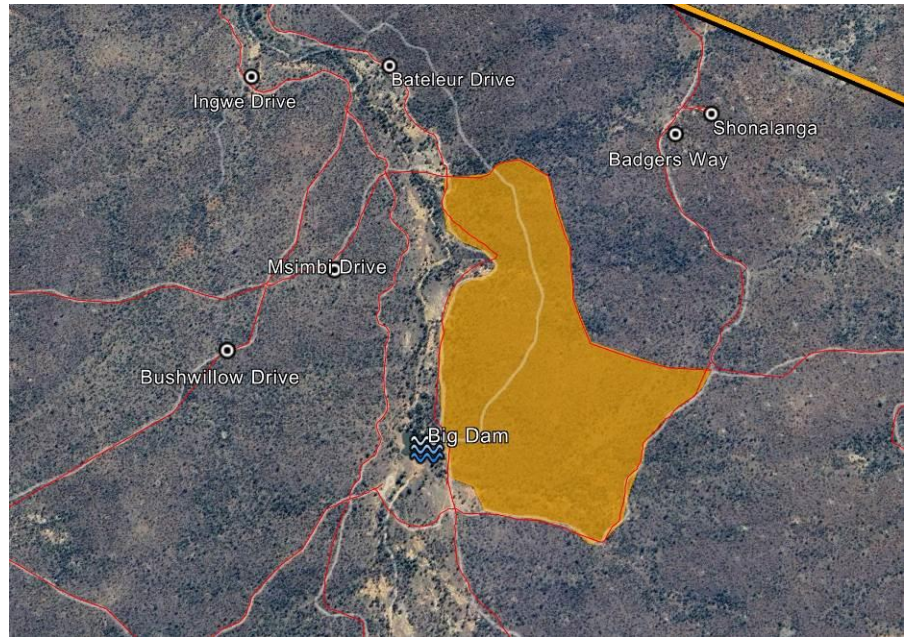


## Hot Off the Press: Quick Response Quells Veld Fire:

On Monday, November 4th, our team at Olifants River Game Reserve sprang into action when a veld fire broke out near Big Dam. Although we managed to get the it under control, it flared up again on Tuesday the 5<sup>th</sup> of November. Teams were deployed to the area and we made a call to back burn the block to control the flames within.

Thanks to the swift response of our dedicated rangers and the support of neighbouring reserves, the blaze, which covered approximately 44 hectares, was quickly contained.

The team had worked tirelessly, utilizing specialized equipment and strategic firefighting techniques to prevent the fire from spreading further. We're incredibly grateful for the collaborative effort. This incident highlights the importance of preparedness and swift action in managing potential fire threats.



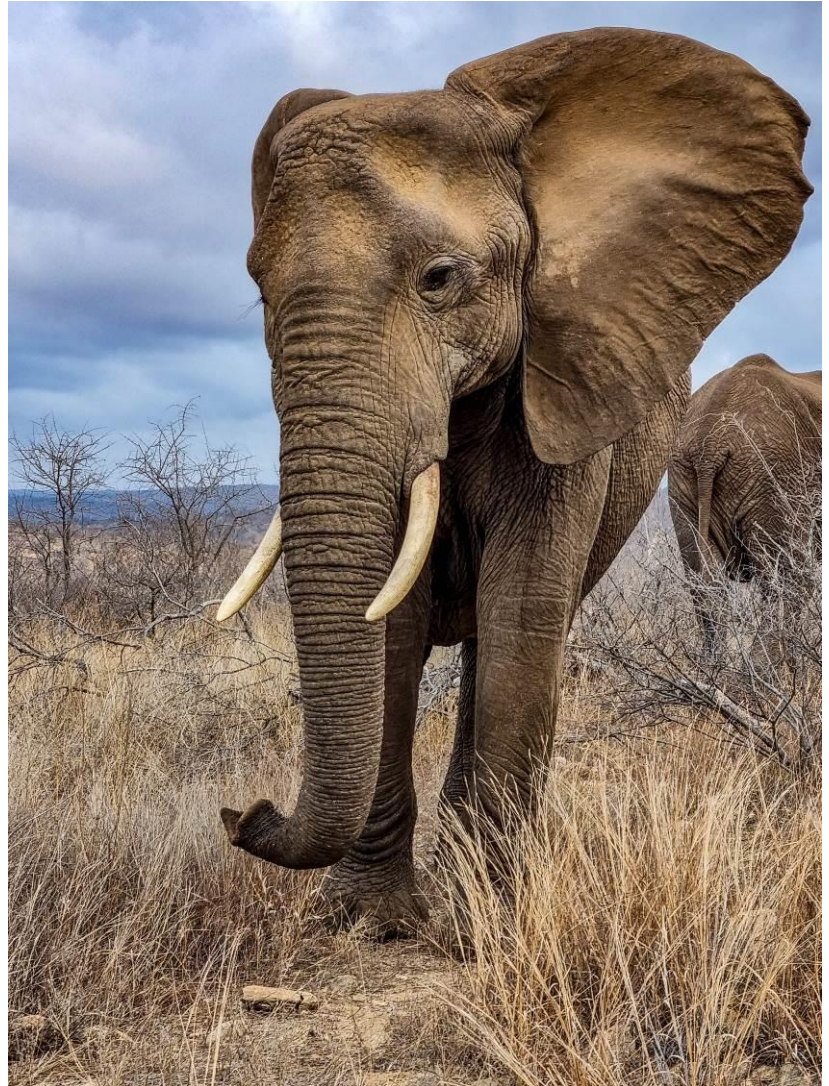
## Update: Associated Private Nature Reserves Elephant Management Plan

In An update on the APNR Elephant Management plan:

As we advised last communication the Elephant Management Plan (EMP) was submitted to Greg Martindale and Mike Peel for comment. They made certain recommendations and suggested changes. Some of these recommendations were not accepted by the APNR wardens as they felt critical issues to manage the species were omitted. A meeting was held last week with the parties involved in which these issues were discussed. They agreed to what must be in the document and we should have the final approved EMP signed off by the scientists no later than mid-November. It will then be submitted to the authorities, at the Limpopo Dept of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET), for final signature. LEDET are aware of the EMP and are expecting it to be submitted for signature.

In line with this BNR will be drafting a five year Ecological Plan which will be aligned to our Land Management Plan and it will incorporate the EMP. The EMP will not have to wait for the Ecological Plan for it to be implemented. Our goal is to implement the EMP as soon as we have the authorised signed off version.

We will keep you updated.



## REACHING OUT

***ANOTHER CALENDAR YEAR  
HAS ALMOST PASSED!***



**BALULE**  
**OUTREACH TRUST**

As the Season of Giving fast approaches, we ask that all our loyal and new supporters consider donating to the BOT in order to allow us to continue with our numerous projects to uplift the surrounding communities. We are ever grateful to those who open their hearts and wallets, year after year!

Many members have enquired about the annual Lex Van Vught wildlife Charity Calendar and we are sad to advise that this venture, which dates back to 2014, has come to an end. We are incredibly grateful to the Van Vught family for the many years they have supported the Balule Outreach Trust (BOT) by donating the proceeds of their calendars to us. Our partnership with them has raised in excess of R500 000 and was a valuable support for our numerous community projects. Time to produce our own ORGR calendar? Watch this space...

Bank Details: FNB Bryanston, Account No: 6233 678 7877. Clearing Code 250 017, Swift No: FIRNZAJJXXX.

***“EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WHICH YOU CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD” - Nelson Mandela***

BOT is delighted to advise that we will be sponsoring 18 learners (from Grades 6 & 7) and two Nature Site Guides who have just completed their NSG L2 course (all from the S.A.M.E. Foundation) to attend a two-night, three day safari camp at nearby Koru Camp from 9 – 11 December.

Koru Camp is the latest addition to the BOT portfolio and is a Big-5 camp adjacent to Olifants that provides adults and children from disadvantaged communities with an immersive, transformative wildlife experience. Most of these children have never experienced the wildlife “on the other side of the fences” and don’t understand the concept or value of conservation. At Koru, they receive an opportunity to spend two to three days in the bush camp to receive excellent mentorship regarding conservation and environmental protection from the co-ordinators and rangers. Attendees will be treated to repeat visits over the years to solidify and enhance their understanding of all aspects of conservation.



# MEMBERS UPDATES

## WEATHER OVERVIEW

We're keeping an eye on the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and it's currently in a neutral phase. While there's a chance it might shift towards a weak La Niña state this summer, it's still a bit uncertain.

### Rainfall Forecast:

- **Good News for the Northeast:** Most of our northeastern regions are looking at above-average rainfall throughout the summer.
- **A Bit Drier in the Interior:** Some parts of the interior might see below-average rainfall, especially mid to late summer.

### Temperature Forecast:

We're expecting warmer-than-usual temperatures across the country this summer.

As the season progresses, we'll keep you updated on any changes to these forecasts, especially if the La Niña develops. Let's hope for a great summer!

## ORGR Local Weather

Rains have been very late this season with only 23,85 mm falling to date. Last year we had already received 142mm at the same time. Temperatures have started climb into the 40s already. We experienced one hell of a storm on the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> of October. Incredible winds speeds caused damage to some infrastructure throughout the region and there was a lighting display that would've impressed Thor himself!



ORGR Seasonal Rainfall totals 2019 to 2024  
(mm)

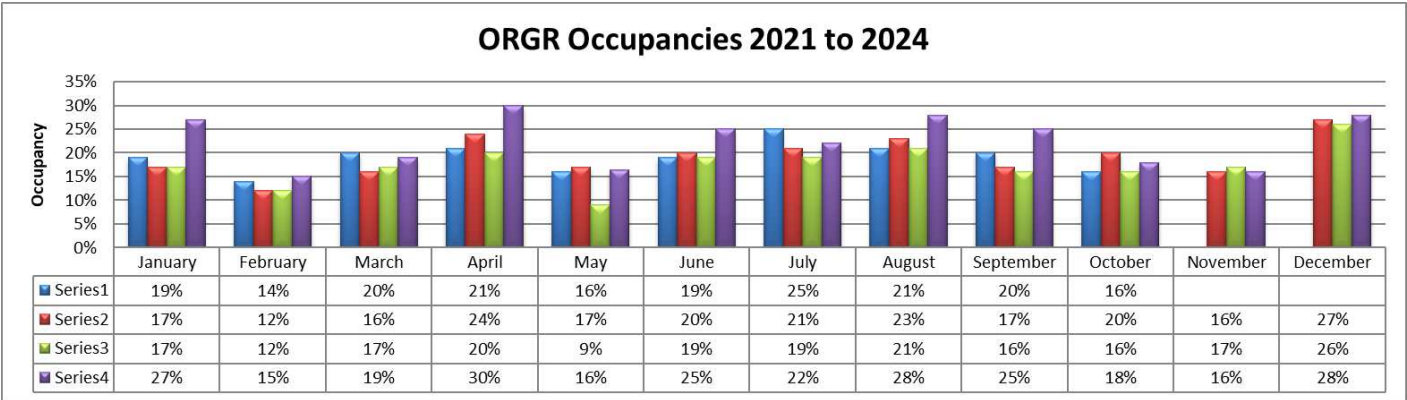


September 2024 Weather Summary - ORGR	High	Low	Average	October 2024 Weather Summary - ORGR	High	Low	Average
Temperature	40.8 °C	9.0 °C	22.6 °C	Temperature	39.0 °C	12.8 °C	24.1 °C
Dew Point	20.6 °C	1.9 °C	12.7 °C	Dew Point	22.0 °C	-2.8 °C	14.1 °C
Humidity	96 %	16 %	57 %	Humidity	96 %	11 %	57 %
Precipitation	0.50 mm	--	--	Precipitation	23.85 mm	--	
Wind Speed	21.7 km/h	0.0 km/h	5.3 km/h	Wind Speed	37.8 km/h	0.0 km/h	6.0 km/h
Wind Gust	31.5 km/h	--	7.5 km/h	Wind Gust	60.0 km/h	--	8.5 km/h
Wind Direction	--	--	SSE	Wind Direction	--	--	SSE
Pressure	1,020.89 hPa	993.30 hPa	--	Pressure	1,022.76 hPa	990.04 hPa	

OCCUPANCIES

August and September were pretty busy times at Olifants River Game Reserve, with around 21% and 20% of units booked, respectively. Things have calmed down a bit in October, with a 16% occupancy.

Average Occupancies	
2024	19%
2023	18%
2022	17%
2021	22%
2020	22%
2019	14%



Celestial Wonders: A Guide to the Southern Sky in November and December 2024

The vast, star-studded canvas of the southern African sky, particularly from the vantage point of the Greater Kruger Area, offers a breathtaking celestial spectacle. As the year draws to a close, November and December present a unique opportunity to witness a variety of celestial phenomena, from meteor showers to planetary conjunctions.

November: A Meteor Shower Extravaganza

November is a particularly active month for meteor showers, with several celestial displays lighting up the night sky. The highlight of the month is undoubtedly the Leonids meteor shower, peaking around the 17th. This



shower is known for producing bright, fast-moving meteors, some of which can even leave persistent trails.

Another notable event is the Taurid meteor shower, which peaks in early November. While less prolific than the Leonids, the Taurids are known for producing slow-moving, bright meteors. To maximize your chances of spotting these celestial wonders, find a dark, secluded spot away from city lights and let your eyes adjust to the darkness.

### December: A Festive Finale

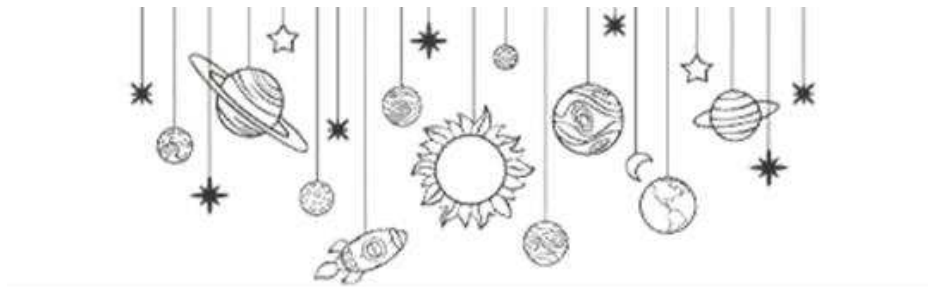
As the year comes to a close, December offers a quieter celestial scene, but still holds some fascinating sights. The summer Milky Way, a breathtaking band of stars and nebulae stretching across the sky, continues to dominate the night. Stargazers can also enjoy the beauty of the Southern Cross, a prominent constellation easily recognizable by its distinctive shape.

For those interested in planetary viewing, Saturn and Jupiter will still be visible in the evening sky, though they will be lower on the horizon than in previous months.

### Tips for Optimal Stargazing:

- **Dark Skies:** The Greater Kruger Area, with its remote location and minimal light pollution, is an ideal spot for stargazing.
- **Clear Nights:** Check the weather forecast for clear, cloudless nights.
- **Patience:** Allow your eyes to adjust to the darkness for at least 20 minutes.
- **Comfortable Clothing:** Dress warmly, as night temperatures can drop significantly.
- **Stargazing App:** Use a stargazing app to identify constellations and celestial objects.

With a bit of planning and patience, the Southern African sky can offer an unforgettable celestial experience. So, grab a blanket, a thermos of hot chocolate, and immerse yourself in the beauty of the cosmos.



### CLUBHOUSE DECK DAMAGE

The Clubhouse deck sustained some damage during the big storm on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October, when an Apple Leaf tree collapsed onto the structure. This deck will need to be removed and we are looking into the costs of rebuilding it from scratch as we are not comfortable with it being safe for use. We will keep the members updated on the progress of this project.

### Scorpion Season is Here!

As we head into the warmer months, it's important to be aware of the increased risk of scorpion encounters. These little critters love the heat and tend to become more active during this time.



## How to Stay Safe:

- **Check Before You Step:** Before slipping into your shoes or climbing into bed, give them a quick once-over. Scorpions love dark, hidden spots.
- **Shine a Light:** A UV flashlight can be a game-changer. Scorpions glow under UV light, making them easy to spot. Give your room a quick scan before settling down.
- **Be Mindful Outdoors:** When enjoying the outdoors, be cautious, especially around rocks, logs, and other potential hiding spots.

## FIRE EXTINGUISHER SERVICE

Please be advised that we will be conducting a comprehensive fire extinguisher service across the reserve throughout November. During this period, our team will be collecting fire extinguishers from your units for servicing. Once serviced, the extinguishers will be promptly returned to you.

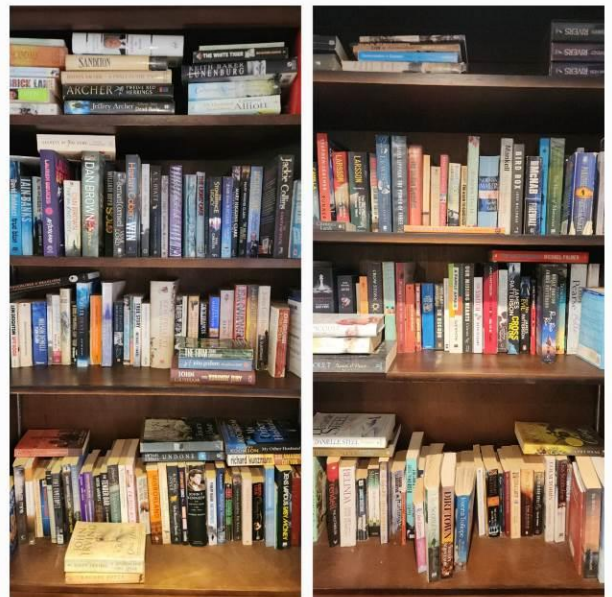
We understand that this is a significant undertaking, and we want to assure you that our team is committed to minimizing any inconvenience. We will work diligently to ensure a smooth and efficient process.

## Discover a Hidden Gem: The ORGR Library

Did you know that just outside Kerry's office lies a treasure trove of books? Our library is brimming with a diverse collection of genres, from thrilling adventures to thought-provoking non-fiction.

## Book Swap Initiative

We encourage all members to participate in our book swap initiative. Bring in your well-loved books and exchange them for new literary adventures. It's a fantastic way to share your favourite reads and discover hidden gems. So, if you're a bookworm looking for your next great read, head over to the library and explore the collection.



## 'Tis the Season for Gin & Tonic!

The festive season is upon us, and what better way to celebrate than with a glass of our world-famous ORGR Gin? This unique spirit, crafted exclusively for ORGR, is not just a tasty tippie! It's also a toast to wildlife conservation. Every sip directly contributes to our vital APU operations, ensuring the protection of our precious wildlife.

So, gather your loved ones, raise a glass, and savour the taste of conservation. And remember, our ORGR Gin makes the perfect gift for the discerning drinker on your list.

**Grab your bottle today at the Olifants Office!**



## THE FINAL WORD

As the year draws to a close, we reflect upon the countless magical moments experienced within the embrace of the Olifants River Game Reserve. From the thrill of a close encounter with a majestic lion to the serenity of a quiet evening under a star-studded sky, the bushveld never fails to capture our hearts and minds.

As we bid farewell to 2024, we extend our heartfelt wishes for a joyous festive season filled with love, laughter, and cherished memories. May the new year bring you peace, prosperity, and countless adventures. From all of us at Olifants River Game Reserve, we wish you a safe and happy holiday season.



*Warmest regards!*

*Nick and the Olifants River Game Reserve Team*

