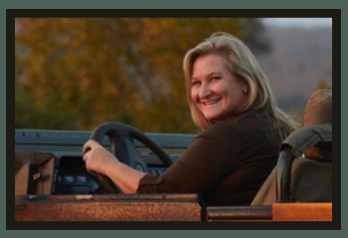
July 2025 Vol 5 Issue 4

Olifants North Newsletter





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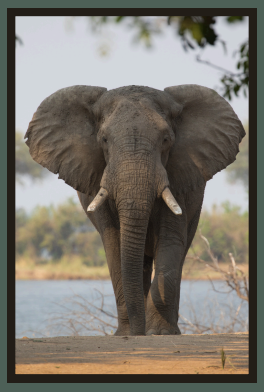


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TRIBUTE TO A GREAT HEART OF THE BALULE FAMILY
SHARON HAUSSMANN
Greater Kruger Environmental Protection Foundation (GKEPF) CEO



The whole of the lowveld was shaken by the news of Sharon Haussmann's recent passing. In particular, the small town of Hoedspruit, and surrounding conservation areas, were particularly affected because to many here, Sharon has been a friend, colleague, mentor and leader.

To honour and acknowledge Sharon's life and contribution to conservation efforts, a memorial service was held on the 10th June at the Drakensig Base in Hoedspruit. By the people and organisations represented, it is clear that Sharon's reach was far and her effect meaningful.

Speeches attesting to her enduring passion and unerring drive towards conservation and community projects were given by Louise Cleary, Barbara Creecy, Michel Gerardin, Col. J Jooste, Maria and James Mayinga, Tom Hancock and her son, Aden.
Tributes were made in the form of a marching parade by rangers. Our own team of wardens, together with members of SANParks with whom Sharon worked closely, also fell in for a sombre moment to salute her.
A particularly moving moment was when a group of 3 helicopters representing different conservation organisations performed a series of fly-overs.

A true Spirit of the Great Heart has been lost, but the work and strides she has made will not be lost or forgotten, but built upon as her torch is carried forward.













The varied landscape of Olifants North lends itself to supporting a variety of fascinating species. The topography and ecological biomes provide suitable habitats for 3 dwarf antelope species which are regularly encountered by many whilst exploring the bush.

By definition, a dwarf antelope is no taller than 60cm at the shoulder and presents with an average weight of 8 - 13kg.

These diminutive antelope belong to the family Bovidae, meaning they are ruminants and have cloven hoofs. Their subfamily is Neotraginae and they are of the tribe Neotragini - small antelope with short, straight horns (males only).



Steenbok

Raphicerus campestris

Raphicerus - Greek for 'needle horn' describing the short straight horns of these antelope

campestris - Latin for 'of the countryside/fields'

* Most common of the three species found on Olifants North
* Prefer lightly wooded grassland habitat
* Require high-quality food, browsing green leaves, pods, fruit, berries and flowers, rarely grazing but will eat fresh tops of grasses and will scrape for edible roots and tubers

*Diurnal, foraging alone even when part of a breeding pair
*Territorial pairs communicate with one another through scent-marking
*Male marks vegetation with a pre-orbital gland
*Territorial dung middens linked by trails are maintained by both sexes; scent glands under feet leave a line of scent at these middens and along pathways
*Distinctively large ears with a fur pattern inside when seen from in front
*1 offspring birthed after 7 month gestation period which becomes mobile within 5min of birth
*Young remain hidden for about 2 weeks (at times longer) after which the mother is followed
*Suckled until 3 months of age

*breed throughout the year with some females producing twice a year
*Independent of drinking water

Klipspringer

Oreotragus oreogratus

Oreotragus - Greek for 'mountain goat'



*Favours large rocky outcrops
*Male stands sentry for large parts of the day while female forages or cares for young
*In areas with high predator density, each member of a pair will take turns to stand guard while its partner forages
*Hooves are cylindrical with blunt tips
*Structure of hair protects the animal from temperature extremes of its chosen habitat; hollow and does not lie flat - providing insulation. Each hair is slightly flattened, enabling reflection when needed.

*Selective feeders that browse, favouring leaves, young shoots of plants, fruit and flowers

*Will even eat lichen, rarely grass and can sustain long periods without water as they obtain sufficient moisture from their food
*Are capable of standing on their hind legs to browse
*Are even able to climb trees with reports from Kaokoland of these antelope climbing trees to browse

*Maintain dung middens and both scent-mark the territory with pre-orbital glands, leaving small black deposits on sticks and vegetation
*Male marks the most and even marks over the marks left by the female
*Alarm calling between pairs maintains pair bond - calling is synchronised and protracted (and has been compared to the duetting of pair-bonded birds)

*1 offspring born after 6 months gestation
*Suckles for up to 4-5 months
*Male young stay with parents up to 6 months, females sometimes up to 11 months

*Preyed upon by pythons, leopards, caracals and Martial Eagles

Sharpe's Grysbok

Raphicerus sharrpei



* Named after researcher who collected first specimen (Sir Arthur Sharpe)
*Prefer thickets and areas of dense vegetation, but can occur in mopane veld with minimal cover
*Nocturnal and crepuscular with shy habits
*Males and females hold a permanent, set territory which is actively defended

*Browsers, feeding on leaves, buds, fruit and herbs, but will also graze, with grass making up 30% of the diet at times
*Ewes are bigger than rams
*Sharpe's Grysbok slightly smaller than Cape Grysbok

*Single offspring born after 7 months gestation

*Due to their shy, secretive nature, Grysbok are difficult to study

Other species of small antelope of the tribe Neotragini found elsewhere in Africa include:

Oribi - 2 subspecies:
1 - Senegal, Ethiopia down to South Africa,
2 - Somalia and along Kenyan coast
* Oribi have six sets of scent glands

Salt's Dik-dik - 8 subspecies focused round Ethiopia

Kirk's Dik-dik - 2 subspecies:
1 - Tanzania and Kenya
2 - Namibia and Angola

Suni - 2 subspecies:
1 - Zanzibar, Kenya and Tanzania
2 - Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique

Royal Antelope
*Ghana and Sierra Leone
*smallest African ungulate

Bates' Pygmy Antelope
*Rarely photographed
*Distribution uncertain - DRC region

Beira Antelope
*Somalia, Ethiopia and Djibouti

OLIFANTS RIVER CLEAN-UP

T. Reid & J.Brink

"*Only we humans make waste that nature can't digest*." – Captain Charles J Moore, oceanographer, who first brought the world's attention to the Great Garbage Patch.

A river clean-up was carried out last Saturday the 28th of June to clear out the significant amount of plastic washed down the river during the last serious summer flood at the end of April.

This was a collaborative effort between the management team and shareholder volunteers.

The management team was represented by Murray, James, Curtis and the new AP trainee, Ciri, Curtis's loyal canine companion. They were joined by a group of 10 volunteers from both Olifants North and Olifants River.





The team started at around 9am, walking upstream towards the office from Driftwood Drive on the Floodplains to end at Speaker's Corner, collecting a myriad of different waste items that had accumulated along the floodplain. The team was treated to fantastic working conditions, with mild weather, wonderful outcrops of the banded and marbled Mkhutswi Gneiss complex, and the occasional grumble of a nearby pod of hippos, which was seldom ignored by Ciri, who regularly had a rebuttal prepared.



The collected rubbish mostly consisted of small plastic fragments and bottles, along with a surprising amount of flip flops and old deodorant cans, filling a grand total of 25 bags. The effort of the volunteers was admirable, and was only limited by the number of bags available. Once the last bag had been filled, the team carried the collected waste the final 500m to Speaker's Corner below the office, unfortunately having to walk past a significant amount of remaining plastic in this section.



Another clean-up took place on the 10th July, where ONGR's conservation team collaborated with Jacques Louw, warden of MSNR, and his team of overseas volunteers. Together, they tackled the section that had been left on the previous outing. A total of 15 bags was filled on this second mission and the volunteers thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to observe the hippo pod as they serenaded the morning with their grumbles. In addition, and to reinforce the reality of their surrounding environment, a pair of fish eagles duetted in flight overhead.

Similar waste items were found, with a significant amount of polystyrene fragments, and the inevitable lone flip flop!

This conservation initiative will continue along the course of the river at various times throughout the year.

"*There is no such thing as 'away'. When we throw anything away, it must go somewhere*." – Annie Leonard, executive director of Greenpeace USA.

https://earth.org/plastic-pollution-quotes/

Normally the warden's report features one of the aspects of managing Olifants North Game Reserve, but this time I would like to take a slight departure from this theme and use this platform to thank one of our departing board members.

For those not aware, Pierre Human, the Security and HR director for ONGR , recently sold his property, which has meant that he will be standing down from the ONGR board. I have been in my current position for 2 years now and feel it is important to mention the significant amount of work Pierre has voluntarily poured into the reserve during his tenure.

At times, his role has put him in conflict positions with many on the landscape, such as whilst enforcing adherence to the abundance of rules and regulations share block developments are bound by, as well as legally steering the intricate and often confusing process around share transfers, or purely by his direct and honest approach to most matters. Upon arrival here, I can honestly say, that the challenges on ONGR were intimidating. However, one of the things upon which I will look back fondly, was taking the opportunity to get to know and understand Pierre, the person. The ONGR board has been extremely supportive of Robyn and I in our time here, but it was Pierre that called me, almost every day, during my stressful and nervy arrival, to check on me. Once we became comfortable with each other, the energy that came from Pierre was palpable, whether it was weekend conversations on admin issues to late night decision making around security matters, I always knew Pierre's support and dedication to the cause were unwavering.

In our combined time here, we have been able to, with support from the board, completely transform the emphasis of our security team, putting us on the front foot when the northern Balule received the African Parks Rhino. His forward-thinking appointment of Curtis Procter, when many thought it an unnecessary role, has borne fruit and has launched a promising young career path in Conservation Security, something that will benefit all at ONGR for years to come.

I will always remember Pierre taking 3 days out of his professional work schedule to spend with Curtis and I to see the completion of Curtis's K9 training programme and to select our first K9 working dog. All of this was possible thanks to his connections, through which he was able to secure training for both Curtis and James at no charge to ONGR (one of many items his connections helped source for us). When Karoo arrived, Pierre was here to host the trainers and spend time in the field with us, getting everyone settled into their new roles. It is wonderful to see the confidence both James and Curtis now have when working with their dogs. Their teamwork is something to behold, thanks, in no small part to knowing that they always had a champion in the background encouraging them that they will get it right.

Across the landscape, Pierre has assisted many regions and BNR management with HR issues and will remain the person to consult for any issues in this area. Pierre was instrumental in the establishment of the BNR Integrity Testing protocols, a key preventative security layer we are blessed to have in the APNR.



This is a small thank you to the huge effort you put in for all of us here, Pierre.

Done at all hours, for the benefit of ONGR. You will be missed, and we look forward to seeing you back here, this time as a relaxed guest on the back of a game viewer, enjoying the landscape you played a significant role in protecting.

Go Well.

STUNTED PLANE / KREUPELROOIHOUT
Ochna inermis





This deciduous shrub to small tree is often overlooked in its favoured dry bush- /mopane- veld habitat (on sandy and rocky hillsides) until it comes into flower and fruit. The Stunted Plane then becomes a showy specimen, covered in yellow flowers for a brief moment (sometimes as short as 24 hours) from September to November.

Thereafter, and lingering longer on the plants than the flowers did, shiny black fruit appear which are encased in red petal-like sepals which fan open to reveal the fleshy fruit within (December to February).

To aid in identification, the plant can be multi-stemmed, with the bark appearing almost white as it ages.

On Olifants North there is a good stand of these on the rocky outcrop along Camp Road on the right hand side of the road at the base of the concrete section as one approaches the camp area.

The flowers attract bees and butterflies which pollinate the plants, and some birds find the ripe fruit palatable.

In South Africa, the Stunted Plane occurs in Limpopo, North-West and Mpumalanga. Beyond our borders, its distribution extends along the eastern part of Africa as far as Ethiopia in favoured habitats.





Schmidt, E., Lotte, M. & McCleland, W. (2002) *Trees and Shrubs of Mpumalanga and Kruger National Park*. Jacana, Johannesburg.



The fungi imaged here are all growing out of elephant dung. They are a group of fungi which derives its nourishment from this decaying matter and collectively the group is referred to as coprophilous or 'dung loving' fungi!



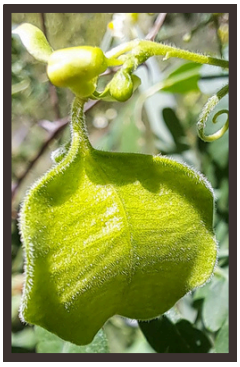




Bushveld Balloon Vine
Cardiospermum corindum

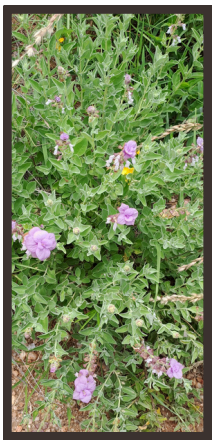
This creeping plant can be spotted growing on shrubs adjacent to the steep concrete section of Rocky Horror on Olifants North.

To monitor as can become invasive.









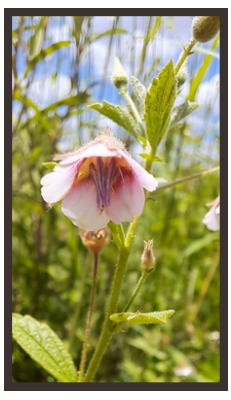




Elliot's
Plumebush/Sagebush

Syncolostemon elliottii

Pale green, fuzzy leaves give the plant a grey appearance. They can be found growing along the access road through Grietjie after the old, unmanned Grietjie Gate and on Berg View Road on Olifants North.





Hermannia glanduligera

Bushy, perennial herb with leaves that have toothed margins. Can flower throughout the year. Stands can be seen on Sedumoni Drive.

Fabian, A. & Germishuizen, G. (1997). *Wild Flowers of Northern South Africa.* Fernwood Press, Vlaeberg.

SOME USEFUL TIPS FOR MANAGING ELEPHANT SIGHTINGS

M.S.Reid

As it is the “elephant season” now, with a substantial number of herds on ONGR at any one point, the likelihood one will come across both herds and roaming bull groups is high. I was asked to put some of the anecdotal experiences and knowledge down to assist those a little uncertain of how to handle these situations.

Rule number 1 - remain calm. Odds are extremely high that if the elephants have seen you and they have not done anything dramatic, then they have no plans to do so. Most times when elephants are dangerous/aggressive, they show that immediately. Elephants are not malicious or sneaky, they attack for a reason (there are many reasons, but if you haven’t given them one, then you are most likely safe – this excludes elephants carrying any injuries).

Rule number 2 – comfort zone awareness. When bumping into the big guys, one usually needs to understand the concept of comfort zones, try to avoid getting too close. If you have stopped and are nervous, keep the engine running. I do advocate for turning the engine off in elephant sightings (once you feel safe), as this calms them and the whole situation down. Once you have stopped, if the elephant continue to move naturally towards you, then they are determining their comfort level/safe space. In fact, it is a wonderful opportunity not to be missed, to allow them to advance towards you while feeding. If you are patient, it is possible to have an entire herd of calm, feeding elephant around your vehicle; one of my favourite experiences in the bush.

Rule number 3 – stop, advance slowly and steadily. The challenge comes when you have driven around the corner and bumped into a herd, at close range, and they have been frightened. It is natural that they will trumpet, run and perhaps crash around, the trick here is again: remain calm. I feel strongly that the situation will be made worse by trying to advance or reverse quickly to get away. Initially, I suggest, that one give the herd a chance to see you have stopped and then you need watch to see what they are doing. In these cases, a few are likely to see you stop and then turn around to face you, which is a natural reaction on their part and not necessarily a sign of aggression. They simply got a fright and have turned around to have a look at what scared them (you).

I have done this regularly at night, as they are hard to see in the dark. I tend to dim my lights, not turn them off, as I also need to see what is happening. I like to give everything around 60 seconds to settle and then I calmly try to move off. When moving away, do not over-rev the vehicle, keep your revs low and speed slow and consistent, even if one decides to mock charge you, do not alter your speed. I believe strongly that by speeding away from an elephant, if they mock charge, you embolden them to keep coming, by staying at a slow steady speed, the vehicles “body language” shows a lack of fear and they will then not react overly aggressively. They simply want the “threat” to leave the area, which you are busy doing, so don’t give them courage by doing it too quickly

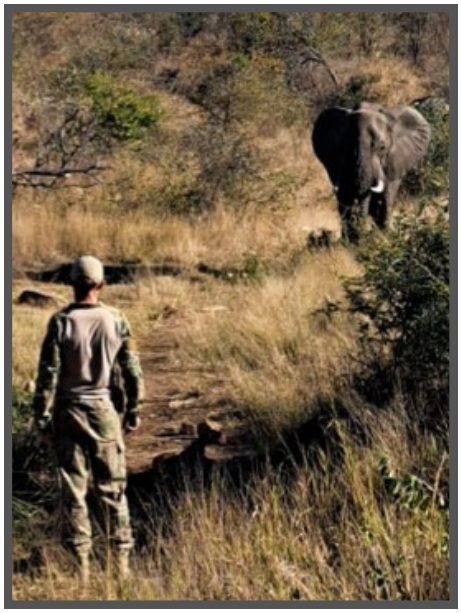
Rule number 4 – observe their body language. There are many things to watch for with elephants that will assist you in gaining confidence around them. They give off many body language cues that help one make a call about the situation. Of all of these cues, the one I find most accurate to keep an eye on is the angle of their tails. Like dogs and cats, they tell you about their mood with their tails. When it is low and swinging, they are relaxed. In contrast, when it is horizontal, they are agitated. This is a sign that they are not happy. Thereafter, they will quickly drop their tail and relax again if the threat/noise is removed or moves away.

The real danger sign is when the tail is right up and perpendicular. This is a problem particularly when a female is with her calf.

When next you sit with a herd, have a look at their tails for signs of their state of mind. Flapping ears are not a sign of aggression (although some guides say they flap faster when they are agitated, but that is very vague and not a reliable cue to use). Bear in mind that crossed front or back legs are not a sign that a charge is coming, something I have been told a few times!

Trunks are the last place I watch for cues, but they do tuck them under their body when a charge is real. However, there should have been multiple cues before that has happened, so I would suggest using that at a guide.

Rule number *5* – noting physiological signs like temporal gland leaking and wet hind legs. Musth occurs in both bulls and cows, and the musth bulls usually demand more caution. That being said, I have spent a lot of time with really relaxed musth bulls, their back legs completely wet and temporal gland leaking, so it is not a hard and fast rule. It is handy to learn the smell of an elephant when it is in musth. When on foot, I tend to make every effort to avoid contact with musth bulls/cows, because of their unpredictability, so this smell is etched into my olfactory memory. One can even smell musth bulls' droppings as they carry a stronger scent, all of which helps you know what is going on around you.



I have really enjoyed spending time with elephants, sharing with others their reactions, trying to gain some insight into their body language. I would highly recommend this for regular visitors to elephant areas. Sharing your sightings with others goes a long way to helping understand them and, as such, dramatically enhances your experience when in big *5* territory.

This is by no means a comprehensive guide, but hopefully goes some way to providing a window into how to safely approach and interpret the many signals given by these complex landscape engineers.





BALULE OUTREACH TRUST

Public Speaking and Debate Competitions 2025

Elimination rounds



Following the success of a high school debate competition held across the Lulekani and Namakgale school circuits (communities surrounding Phalaborwa) in 2024, it was decided to expand the project to include a public speaking component amongst the primary schools in these same regions in 2025.

The purpose behind these school-focused initiatives is to engage learners within communities proximal to conservation areas on conservation and environmental topics.
The positive outcomes are manifold, but include the development of public speaking skills as well confidence in communicating, and to develop critical thinking skills and debating skills - particularly in the case of the debating event.
From an conservation perspective, we want to find out what our youth are thinking and to bring attention to conservation matters that are pertinent to them and the landscape surrounding them. Education is a meaningful tool through which the future can be shaped by guiding and engaging with the youth.

Both competitions were structured around a knock-out round within each circuit to determine the school that would represent their circuit at the finals, where they would need to face off against the winning school from the other circuit (Namakgale vs Lulekani) , thereby determining the overall winning school.

The topic for the primary school learners centred around the illegal wildlife trade and its impact on our daily lives, whilst the high school students needed to debate whether bush meat harvesting could promote both conservation and community livelihoods.

A panel of independent judges followed a strict rubric to score teams and individuals within each team. At the end of each elimination round, a school came out victorious and a learner was also selected as the speaker of the event.

The final rounds will take place in the Kruger National Park.
The primary schools of Pondo Combined (representing Lulekani) and Francolin Primary (representing Namakgale) will tackle 'The importance of protected areas goes far beyond wildlife protection' as their topic.

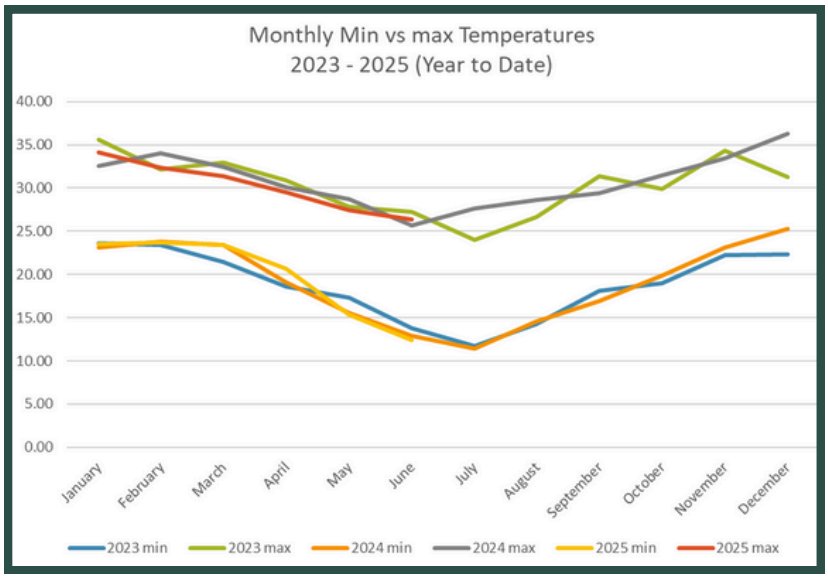
For the high schools of Nkateko Secondary (which came second last year- representing Lulekani) and Francolin College (representing Namakgale), the debate will centre around the comment, 'Environment conservation and economic growth are incompatible.'

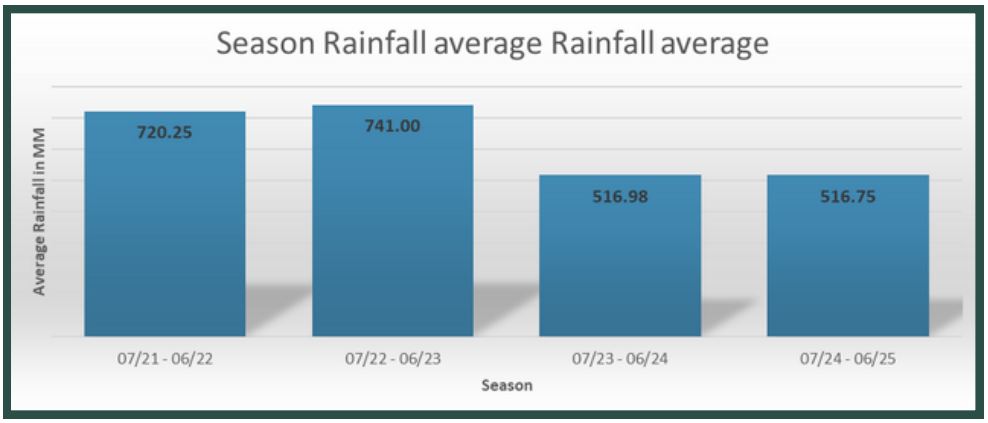
All the schools that have made it through to the finals are so excited as they will be collected by SANParks on a designated Friday morning and transported to Letaba Rest Camp where the final debate or public speaking event will be held.
Thereafter, the Elephant Museum will be visited and then everyone will move on to Mopani Rest Camp for an overnight stay followed by SANParks-arranged morning game drive and breakfast at which time the winners will be announced.

This event is likely to continue growing and expanding as new ideas as to venues, topics and approaches come to the fore.

A meeting with Sharon Haussmann earlier this year included discussing bringing an art component to the competition for those who express themselves better through drawing/art than verbally and this is being looking into for 2026. What a meaningful way to keep her torch burning on the African conservation landscape.

RAINFALL AND TEMPERATURES





MOON PHASES

All times expressed in South African Standard Time (SAST) currently Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) +2Hrs

AUGUST MOON PHASES

First Quarter 1 August at 14h41

Full Moon 9 August at 09h55

Third Quarter 16 August at 07h12

New Moon 23 August at 08h06


Hippo (at the) Pools!
50°F 10°C Camera ID: P00LS1 06-07-2025 19:49:16


80°F 27°C Camera ID: CAM001 05-25-2025 12:17:38

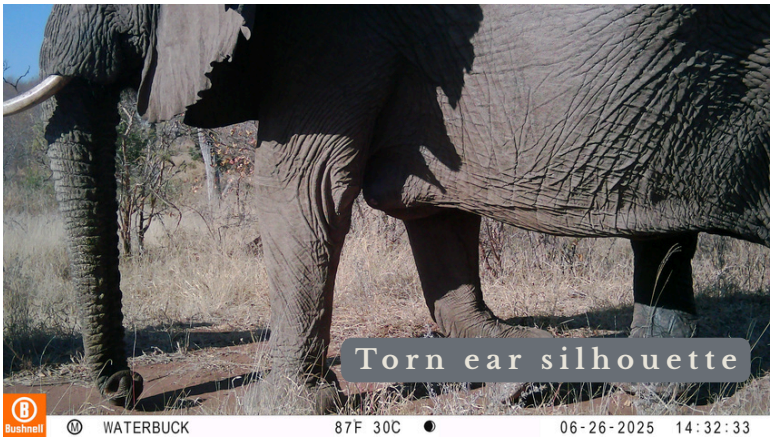

Impala acrobatics
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WILDEBEEST 96F 35C 06-01-2025 09:53:54

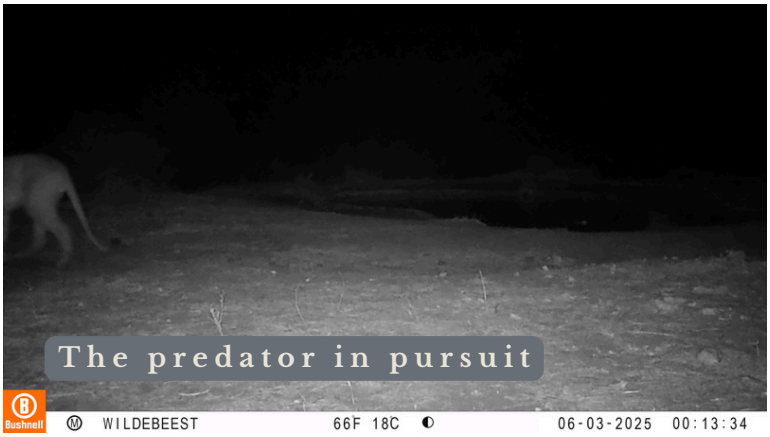

Yellow-billed Oxpecker
84°F 29°C Camera ID: CAM001 05-31-2025 10:14:02

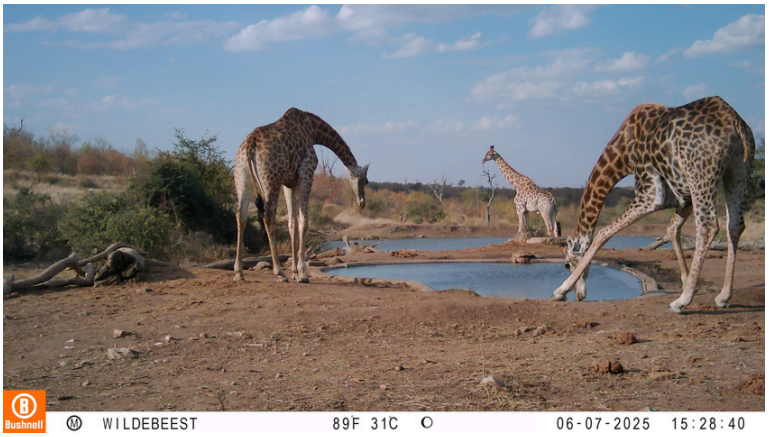

WATERBUCK 49F 9C 06-26-2025 00:41:24


44°F 7°C Camera ID: PEBBL2 05-27-2025 06:58:29


Torn ear silhouette
WATERBUCK 87F 30C 06-26-2025 14:32:33


The fleeing prey
WILDEBEEST 66F 18C 06-03-2025 00:13:24


The predator in pursuit
WILDEBEEST 66F 18C 06-03-2025 00:13:34


WILDEBEEST 89F 31C 06-07-2025 15:28:40


75°F 24°C Camera ID: CAM001 06-27-2025 09:01:45


WILDEBEEST 55F 12C 06-05-2025 00:08:56


89°F 32°C Camera ID: CAM001 05-30-2025 12:55:57


50°F 10°C Camera ID: P00LS1 06-25-2025 08:06:25


Side-striped Jackal
37°F 3°C Camera ID: CAM001 05-22-2025 02:24:08