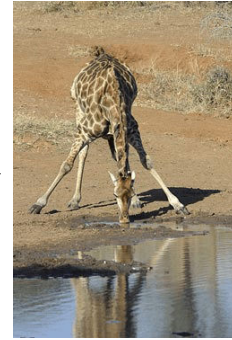


Karongwe Private Game Reserve

Newsletter July 2008



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Issue 4

1. Welcome

Welcome to the fourth issue of the Karongwe Private Game Reserve newsletter. As always it has been a busy three months on Karongwe since the last newsletter, with new editions,

new projects and lots of excitement, making this newsletter full to bursting! So sit back, relax and enjoy.

2. Savannah's new brood

Once again the now infamous Savannah (the Paris Hilton of Karongwe) makes it into the newsletter, but this time with some good news. From early July, Savannah started localizing her movements to around Rooikat dam. Although she would sometimes be found elsewhere, usually on a kill, she repeatedly returned to the same place. This type of behaviour suggests one thing – cubs. Jade, the Head Ranger of Kuname Lodge and Lucky from Shiduli Lodge were tracking her one afternoon and found her lying in a drainage line with at least 3 little ones next to her.

Savannah abandoned her previous cub when it was just 3 weeks old, so we are waiting with bated breath for the outcome of this litter. In order to give Savannah the best chance to raise these cubs the location around the den is currently closed to game drives. Cheetah cubs



have a high mortality rate in the wild, and by keeping the area around the den undisturbed it will help to protect the cubs against the awareness of other predators. The cubs are currently 1 month old and we are hoping that with a little bit of luck, motherly love and dedication from Savannah she will pull these cubs through.

3. Maggie's creche

Sighting of Maggie's cubs have increased dramatically over the last few months, with the infrequent sightings now becoming almost daily visuals of the troublesome trio. The cubs are now 5 months and have been identified as two males and one female. Maggie tentatively introduced the young cubs to the rest of the pride, and since then



they have traveled with the adults, joining them at kills, and bringing a playful side to the rest of the pride. Their antics are the delight of everyone who sees them.



4. Prickly pear project

The prickly pear project launched by G.V.I. and Karongwe Game is in full swing, in an attempt to remove and infect as many prickly pears as possible. G.V.I. staff and volunteers have spent their midday activities removing these alien plants from our beautiful conservancy. Once the prickly pears are removed they are placed in an old cement dam and burnt to prohibit any further spread of this pest.

This is a great benefit to Karongwe, helping to promote indigenous species, but has not happened without many hours of work and lots of thorns. Thorns from prickly pears are one the most difficult to remove, and G.V.I. staff and volunteers have been pulling these out from all over their body – literally! Thanks to all of those who have put hours of hard work into this project.



5. Shiloweni's teeth

As predicted in the last newsletter, Shiloweni the male leopard provided some amazing sightings for everyone on Karongwe. He would casually stroll past vehicles, unaware of the awestruck people watching him pass, and stalk his prey, content to do so with amazed onlookers nearby.



Keeping his food away from other predators

However, after a month of roaming free on Karongwe Shiloweni's behaviour started changing. His kill frequency decreased and he started losing condition. Something wasn't right with Karongwe's new star. The decision was made to sedate him so he could be examined by Dr. Peter Rodgers, and any potential problems could be identified.

The examination revealed huge abscesses in Shiloweni's upper canines, which explained why he was struggling to eat. This

meant there were only two options: put him down; or find a dentist to help. After all the effort that had already been made to give Shiloweni a second chance, there was no way he was going to be put down now.



Dr. Rodgers and Dr. van der Mescht working their magic

Instead, a dentist was needed and not any dentist, a dentist that would be willing to perform oral surgery on a 60 kg male leopard! Dr. Sonia van der Mescht from Tzaneen was contacted and she grabbed the challenge with both hands and agreed to perform the procedure cost free.

Removing the canines was never going to be as easy as it would on a human, and after a tiring 6 hours, the canines were finally out. They had been set approximately 6cm into the jaw, making the procedure long and difficult for everyone involved.



A closer look at the canines and abscesses

The next problem was what to do next. If Shiloweni was released now, he would have difficulty taking his kills into trees, particularly important in a predator dense area like Karongwe, and also would struggle in any territorial disputes with other males. Therefore, Dr. van der Mescht suggested to build Shiloweni a whole new set of canines,

using the highest quality dentistry implants.

Shiloweni has spent the last 2 months in a quarantine boma where he has been fed soft meat and organs to allow his teeth to heal. His condition has improved dramatically and he is once again looking his beautiful self.



Constant helping out with the procedure

The construction of this new set of canines took 2 months, giving him enough time to recover from the previous surgery. The new canines were designed in Pretoria and were constructed and tested by a team including 4 mechanical and 2 chemical engineers. The story of Shiloweni's new teeth has attracted a lot of media attention, and stories appeared in the Rapport, Kruger Park Times newspapers and Africa Wild and Getaway Magazines.

However, things never run as smoothly as hoped, and with the press came a critic. Dr. Steenkamp from Onderstepoort objected to the procedure. Apparently the law states that in



a procedure such as this a veterinary dentist should be used, and a human dentist can only be used if a veterinary dentist is not available. As Dr. Steenkamp is such a dentist, it meant he would need to be involved in any further procedures. An added concern was that not enough is known about implants in wild leopards to proceed with the implants.

On 4th August the next stage of

Shiloweni's dentistry commenced, where Dr. Steenkamp and Dr. Rodgers joined forces to perform a root canal. Dr. Steenkamp performed root canals on both of Shiloweni's lower canines and one upper tooth, and also stitched gum flaps over the holes that had been left from the upper canine removal. The entire procedure took 7 ½ hours, and by 17:30 Shiloweni was back in his boma. He was watched overnight as he recovered from the anesthetic.



It is amazing to be involved in a project such as this, where an animal can be released back into the wild. For this to be possible funds, hard work, and many hours of dedication is needed. Therefore Constant and Shiloweni would like to thank the following people:

- Neil Finnie (G.V.I.) who helped to sponsor the whole project.
- Dr. Peter Rodgers for all his hard work, passion and dedication.
- Dr. Sonia van der Mescht for taking on such an extraordinary patient and for the hours spent discussing and planning that ensued.
- Dr. Gerhard Steenkamp who performed the root canals free of charge.
- All the G.V.I. staff and volunteers that check up on him every day.
- The Karongwe Game owners, who believed in this project and stuck to it unconditionally.
- Sam for living like a widow for the last three months while I spent countless hours with Shiloweni.
- And for everybody else who put time, effort, money and support into this project.

6. Karongwe Game numbers

As the end of winter is in sight, the reserve is getting very dry. This makes visibility increase dramatically, and it almost seems as though there is a sudden rise in general game numbers. Game counts are conducted annually at the end of September/beginning of October when visibility is still good, and this provides details of exactly how many animals there are on Karongwe. To conduct the game count 4 people count from a helicopter flying

over Karongwe. They use g.p.s. coordinates to dictate where to fly and cover areas of approximately 300m at a time.

Some animals are more difficult to count, such as Nyala and Bushbuck, due to their habitat and even the bigger ones, like elephant and rhino like to hide sometimes. The game count is used to give Karongwe Game management and owners an accurate estimate of game numbers, providing them with the opportunity to make informed management decisions.

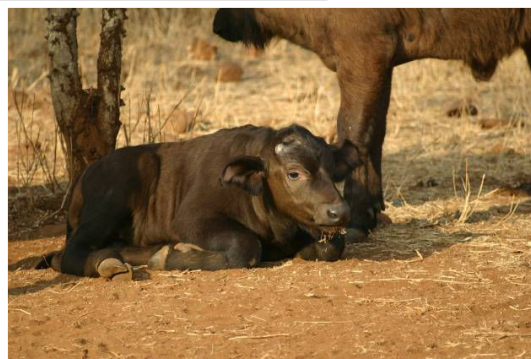
2006 and 2007 game count figures

Animals	2006 count	2007 count - current
Impala	1153	1769
Kudu	117	200
Zebra	130	165
Blue wildebeest	184	185
Giraffe	98	84
Waterbuck	165	173
Cheetah	3	9
Elephant	18	18
Spotted Hyena	16	10
Warthog	162	202
Duiker	10	11
Bushbuck	22	36
Nyala	27	37
Elephants	19	17
Lion	7	6
Leopard	10 est	10 est
White rhino	8	10
Cape buffalo	14	15
Hippo	20 est	24 est

7. Buffalo babies

The buffalo are still going strong and in addition to the new buffalo calf reported in the last newsletter, there is another new arrival on the scene! A bull calf was born on 17th May, and brings the number of disease free buffalo to 15.

We are expecting next year to be even more fruitful, with hopefully 4 more calf's.



8. Shrek – the baby rhino

On a Sunday morning Constant received a desperate call from Rob from Eco-training about a young rhino. He had found a dead new born calf at Rock Fig Dam. Just two days previously they had seen Jessica with a new born calf, so they suspected it must be hers. A rhino calf would have been such an asset to Karongwe, and it was very sad to hear this little one had not made it.

Constant, Anton from G.V.I. and Rob went to investigate what had happened to the calf, and upon arrival quickly realized that the rhino was still alive. Spurred into action they reacted quickly, picking it up and covering it with blankets to keep it warm.



Shrek at Moholoholo

The rhino needed help, and fast, so they loaded it into Lourens from G.V.I.'s Toyota Hilux, as the canopy on the back would help to keep the rhino warm. They raced to Moholoholo Rehabilitation Centre, where Brian Jones and his team were ready waiting for them. The rhino was quickly transferred

to their in-house clinic, and Dr. Peter Rodgers arrived shortly after to give the calf the attention and medication it desperately needed.



The rhino was very weak, and while he had been lying in the bush, his ears had been chewed off by jackals. Dr. Rodgers went to work, and after amputating most of the rhino's ear, bandaged his head to help them recover. The small ears earned the rhino the name Shrek.

The staff at Moholoholo spent hour after hour looking after little Shrek, and even had volunteers sleeping with him overnight in case of any problems. Apart from his ears, Shrek also had some difficulty breathing and a twisted back leg. Despite all the odds, the swift reactions on Karongwe and the care and attention of Dr. Rodgers and the team at Moholoholo meant that he still had a fighting chance. He seemed to be improving by the day, and also became a local celebrity, appearing in the Rapport and Kruger Park Times newspapers.

Two weeks ago Constant received a call from Moholoholo with some sad news, Shrek had gone outside for his morning walk and suddenly fell over and passed away. Dr. Rodgers conducted an autopsy and found he had died of pneumonia and multiple abscesses on his liver, lungs and heart. He also had a

few broken ribs, causing Dr. Rodgers to describe it as a miracle that he had survived for so long. It was a very sad day for all of those that had had the pleasure of seeing and interacting with this little rhino. Thank you to all the Moholoholo staff, Dr. Rodgers and everyone involved enough for everything you did for little Shrek.

9. Updates on the other animals



Ketswiri

Ketswiri has coped well after her release and has moved some considerable distances, discovering her new home. She has become a bona fide bushbuck killer, specializing in catching her prey against the project fenceline. Despite the usual hunting success rate of 50% among cheetah, Ketswiri even managed to catch 2 bushbuck in one morning! She is an incredible cat with a distinct personality, and a pleasure to all who see her, especially from foot.



The cubs on a fresh impala kill, courtesy of their mum

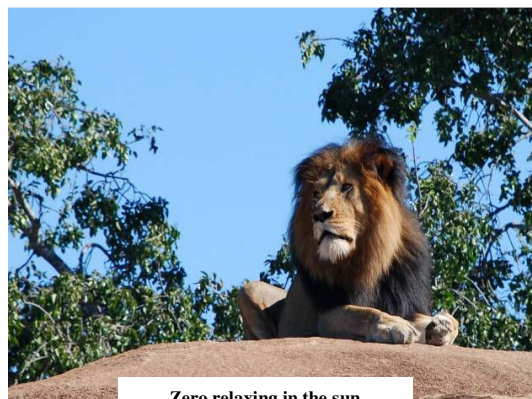
Nyeleti and her cubs are also doing very well, and the cubs appear to be one male and one female. The family have become so relaxed with vehicles that the drives will often seem the every day. Twice Nyelti has also made a kill right in front of a game drive vehicle! A rare and exciting sight for anyone to see.

A new resident female leopard has also been spotted frequently recently. She is extremely relaxed and in one morning 10 drives had the privilege of seeing her whilst she relaxed nearby. Her territory is around Lisa's Dam and Chipembere Spruit, so if you are on a drive in these areas, keep an eye out for her.



The new girl in town

A rare moment of glory for Zero, as despite being such an impressive animal, he does not feature in the newsletter much. He is approaching 11 years old, and is still as handsome as ever. He is the father of all the cubs, despite being given the slip occasionally by the females, is still very much the king of the jungle. He has recently been visiting the Makalali lions on the Eastern side of the reserve, giving an impressive display of roaring and sizing them up through the fence.



Zero relaxing in the sun

10. Shiduli Game Lodge

The old Ingwe lodge has been completely revamped and revitalized since being taken over by Rudolf and Sonia Hanni.



It has been renamed 'Shiduli', which means 'termite mound' in Shangaan. The warm atmosphere that envelopes you when you enter the lodge makes this the perfect name.



We wish Rudolf, Sonia and the Shiduli team the best of luck in their new adventure.



11. Tilo joins the maternity club

Not to be outdone by her lion and cheetah counterparts, Tilo has also joined the maternity club. In early July Rene from G.V.I. was tracking Tilo, and found her in a dense block. The usually quite shy Tilo made her presence very well known, when she bolted out of the bushes towards the vehicle. Even though Rene was still approximately 50 metres from when Tilo had been hiding, Tilo clearly did not want anyone in that area. This protective behaviour suggested there



must be something there worth protecting. Namely, cubs. These suspicions were confirmed a few weeks later when Lourens from G.V.I. saw 2 tiny leopard cubs playing

next to a relaxed Tilo. The cubs are already unaffected by the presence of vehicles, and continue to play, unaware of those admiring them from a distance

12. Guide of the month

From August onwards, each month a 'guide of the month' award will be given. The guide of the month will be decided by Constant and the Head Rangers of each lodge. This award will be given for good conduct on drive, repairing off-roads, tracking and finding animals on their own, particularly leopards, and for instances where

a guide has gone that extra mile for the good of the reserve. Each guide that receives this accolade will be given a reward and will be featured in the next newsletter. A good incentive for everyone to improve their skills, and keep up the good work they are already doing.

Good luck everyone!

13. Interesting sightings: the rise of the honey badger

It was a usual morning research drive and G.V.I. had been tracking Zero for a while. They finally found him lying in the Makutsi river, doing what he does best, and sleeping. Suddenly someone spotted a honey badger sauntering down the river, and it was heading straight towards Zero! Honey badgers have a fierce reputation, but



surely one would not stand up the big man himself. Everyone held their breath, waiting for a lion kill.

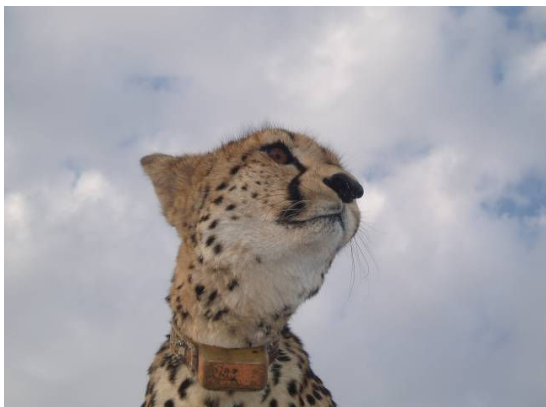
The honey badger approached and Zero lifted his impressive face towards it. Everyone watching tensed, and the honey badger, completely unaffected by the presence of this great lion next to it, continued on its path and simply strolled right by. They obviously decided it would be better for both of them if they let this encounter slide, although it would have been interesting to see who would have been crowned champion if the decided to fight.

On a separate occasion, Jade, Head Ranger of Kuname River Lodge, was driving along Golden Highway and stopped to point out a snake to her guests. As she slowed she noticed that the African Rock Python she has seen had 2 very hungry honey badgers attached to it. Once again unfazed by the size and strength of the snake, the honey badgers devoured it while Jade and her guests watched in awe.



14. Thanks to collar sponsors:

In order for the research to continue on Karongwe it is necessary to collar some of the animals. These collars do not come cheaply, and it is always a battle to find the budget to accommodate these. However, the generosity



of a few special people has made this task much easier.

A big thank you goes out to the following people who sponsored collars for us:

- Chris Rowan
- Mafunyane Bushcamp
- Riaan Stassen (Monate)
- Rudolf and Sonia Hanni
- Conrad Kruger's father-in-law
- Makutsi Spa

Your donation is sincerely appreciated.