



September 2014

NEWSLETTER



Photograph: L. Bleeker

COMMITTEE UPDATE by Hans Schmid

MIGS

We welcome another couple from the Netherlands to Grietjie. Patrick and Esther van Tour have bought plot 48 and have signed the constitution, bringing the total MIGS to 50. We wish them many happy days on Grietjie.

FIRST MEETING OF NEW COMMITTEE

The first meeting took 5 hours and it was decided that meetings will be held every second month only. We will however maintain contact via the internet.

The AGM action list was completed and Maxine will forward this list to you. Portfolios were allocated; we just list the major ones. Theunis Trollip was co-opted to assist with security.

Security and operation of Main gate – Blackie de Swardt & T Trollip

Infrastructure of plot 64 & gate, owner liaison – Pierre Ackermann

Personnel –Mike Clulow

Roads & fences - Hans Schmid

Secretarial duties – Maxine Smith, Manda van Wyk, H Schmid

CARE, CAPS, owner liaison – Peter Meier

Sue Patrick will continue to maintain the website. Sharon Schmid will stay on as the editor of our newsletters, and obviously Neil Bridges will continue with the treasurer duties (by now you should have had your invoice and statement – have you paid yet?)

The new contact details of your committee will soon be updated on the website.

VICE CHAIRMAN

The AGM is over, but a vice chairman was not elected. The suitable person to fill this position would get involved with the committee and then take over as chairman next year. The attendees at the AGM did not produce such a volunteer. Therefore we advertise this position to the remainder of the members. If you want to serve your community and make your mark, please step forward and we will co-opt you to the committee. As Blackie stated, we do need continuity within the committee. Please respond by 31 October 2014.

STAFF ACCOMODATION

It was decided that GPNR should have its own section of land where we can build permanent staff quarters and maybe a store/lay down area as well. We are also fortunate that the current warden has his own accommodation on Grietjie. Currently we rely on the goodwill of the owner of plot 64 but have no guarantee of this land usage. Furthermore, the current quality of staff accommodation is not up to standard. A perfect location would be near the fourways (eg. Plot 125), but it must also be out of sight for passers-by. We need to ensure the vicinity of essential services such as water and electricity.

One suggestion was to utilize the land that belongs to the now defunct Olifants River Trust: 1 morgen areas previously ear-marked on highpoints for reservoir sites, and a bigger area, the picnic site, for a river pump station and purification works. Whereas the picnic area should not be interfered with, four reservoir high points are not easily accessible, two are accessible, but are too close to existing houses (plots 35 & 39).

We therefore appeal to a member in a suitable position along the main roads near the entrance to lease us approximately 1 ha of land for the purpose of erecting permanent facilities for GPNR and their staff. As the constitution does not allow subdivisions smaller than 21 ha, a long term lease agreement is the only option.

Maseke Game Reserve (Sean Nielsen)

The inclusion of Maseke into Balule created a heated discussion at the AGM. Members wanted more detail and to be involved in the final decision. The report has been sent out to the members, and we are awaiting feedback. Due to the importance of this issue, a Maseke sub-group was formed consisting of Mark Rodwell, Marius Porteus, Freek Venter and Hans Schmid – collectively there is some remarkable knowledge amongst these members.

Collection of Fees at the Gate

This was a leftover from the 2013 AGM as the last committee was tasked to investigate the collection of fees for contractors and deliveries. The new committee was asked to re-investigate this issue.

We obtained some legal advice. Basically if the gazetted permission for Grietjie to erect a boom gate specifies that we cannot charge fees to any “member of the public”, then we cannot collect fees unless the wording is amended and the amendment is gazetted. The previous committee thus took the correct decision as was detailed in the March 2014 Newsletter. Anyone who has contacts with provincial administration and can have further input into this matter is welcome to submit any new facts to the committee. In the meantime, the committee has closed this issue.

Recycling

As you are aware, we recycle (all) cans and glass at the gate. Separate bins have been provided for each product.

Unfortunately we still have owners who dump general refuse into these bins.

This is totally irresponsible and unacceptable and costs us money and time to sort. The recycling service will be discontinued if refuse dumping continues.

Annual Balule Game counts

In the past years, detailed game counts of all animals were done by helicopter flying on certain grid lines covering the whole of Balule and costing about R230,000 per census. Last year a drainage line survey was conducted where helicopters flew on each side of a drainage line and only elephant, buffalo, rhinos and hippos were counted. This count was compared with the gridline survey and

reconciled well. This year the drainage line survey was repeated at a total cost of about R107,000. Next year a detailed census will be done, and the two systems will then be alternated every two years. The census done on 29, 30 & 31 August produced 19 elephant, x rhinos, 3 buffalo and 22 hippos on Grietjie. Last year 46 elephants and 140 buffalo were counted however these two species do migrate over substantial areas.

We have had our fair share of elephants this year and I believe that the 46 counted last year do present a more accurate average. Elephant counts for the whole Balule for the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 were 243, 544 and 669 respectively. As Balule is 42,577 ha in size, the elephant density for those years is then 5.7, 12.8 and 15.7 elephant per 1,000 ha. Elephant density in the Kruger Park is approximately 5 per 1,000 ha.

The big herd of buffalo that frequented the northern side of the Olifants river was last seen on Grietjie in April this year. It seems that they have migrated south.

Warden on leave

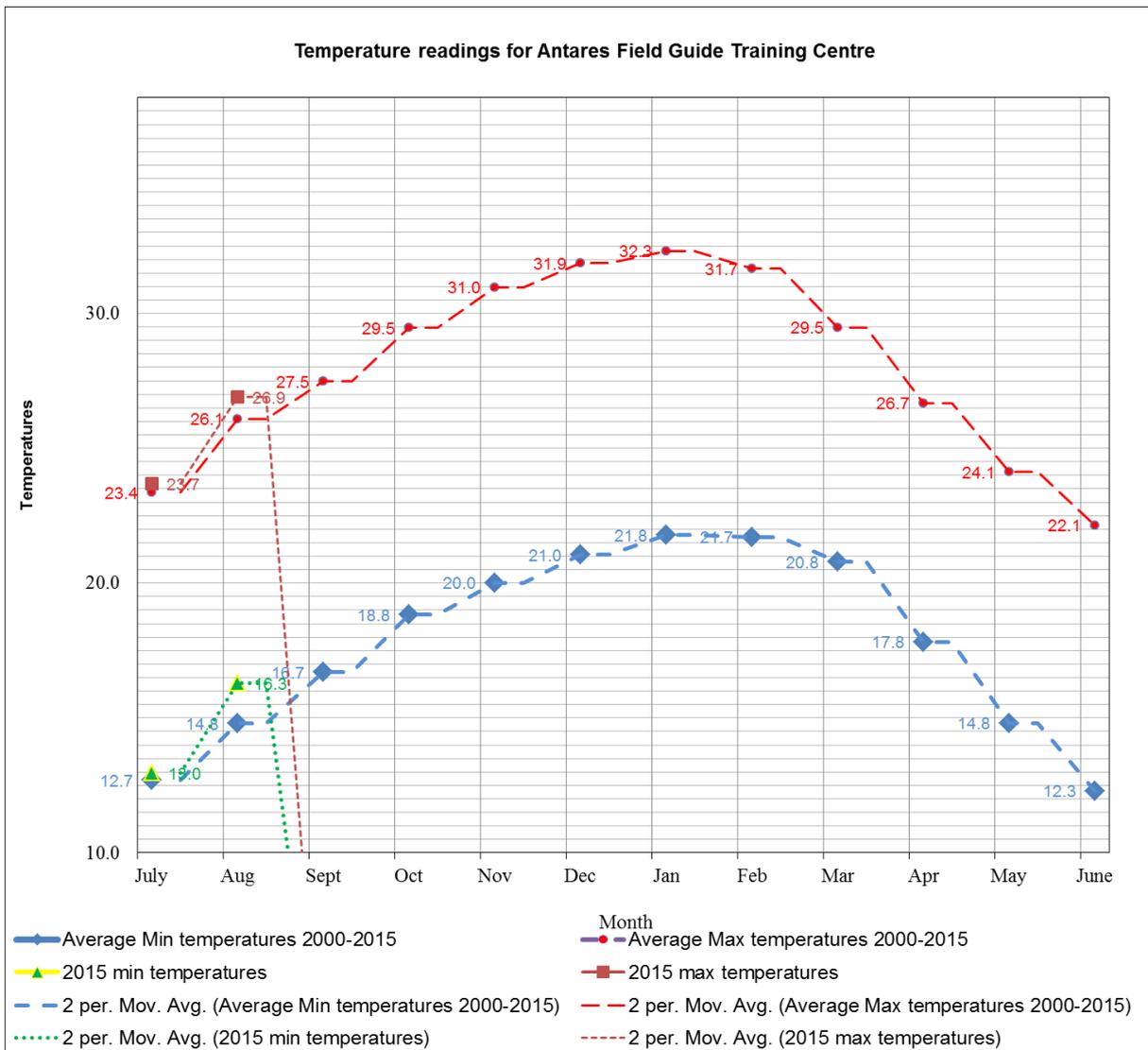
Johan will take 24 days leave from 25 September to 18 October, both days inclusive. Theunis Trollip will stand in during September and Blackie de Swardt during October. The warden's contact number will remain as 078 875 8722.

Anti-poaching success

The arrests of two poaching gangs at the beginning of September has hit the poaching community hard, but being a lucrative "business", there will soon be others to follow where those arrested failed.

1. An armed rhino poaching gang was apprehended by security forces while gaining access into Grietjie. Two poachers were wounded while resisting arrest. The arrests were not entirely due to luck, they were anticipated. We cannot elaborate on this operation as we do not have the full details, nor do we want to jeopardize any future operations within Balule.
2. A day later, the operators of a bush kitchen on Doreen were caught red handed and arrested in an operation led by Johan who was assisted by our neighbouring reserves, the Black Mambas and Protrack.

In both cases the culprits were handed over to the SAPS who will prosecute. We sincerely hope that the sentences meted out are a deterrent to future poaching.



LATE WINTER GRAZING REPORT

by Dr Mike Peel

Grazing situation middle winter 2014: Grietjie

This report presents the grass standing crop data collected across the Grietjie Game Reserve (GGR) at the end of the 2013/14 growth season and relates these data to projected animal numbers (excluding a predation factor to give the 'worst case scenario') in order to assess whether there will be sufficient grass to satisfy the grazing needs of the herbivores on GGR this winter.

Method

I examine the effect of resource use by grazers by inserting the resource requirements for wildebeest, warthog, impala, waterbuck, zebra, buffalo, hippo, rhino and elephant to determine whether the individual populations (projected from 2013 counts) can be sustained on the grass available on GGR through the winter of 2014.

Results and Discussion

If we feed this year's standing crop into the model ($\approx 798\text{kg/ha-1}$) and project an increase in animal numbers (not including predation to give worst case scenario) then we see that there would be sufficient grazing for the coming season. However if we look at the current situation (with projected numbers and no predation) the prediction was that if we had had a 700kg/ha-1 2013/14 season there would be shortage of food for grazers (this did not happen of course but it is not by a large margin). This also assumes that the animals are sedentary which they obviously are not. The upshot of this is that if there is a movement out of the area of animals (most likely buffalo, zebra and elephant as opposed to water dependent species that do not move e.g. impala) this would push the situation into a 2 favourable or unfavourable situation depending on whether there is immigration or emigration of animals.

We have reached a situation where the removal of certain species (probably sedentary water dependent species such as impala) may be considered on ecological grounds. The worst case scenario is that we suffer a drought and lose animals and/or where: some pressure will have been taken off the veld; we will recoup something from offtakes; (feeding is not an option). The best case scenario would be that we do not suffer a drought and the veld remains in a better condition and where: some normal attrition would take place; pressure is taken off the veld. I suggest further that we do some faecal analysis on populations of concern to serve as an adjunct to the other available ecological data.

POLLUTION OF THE OLIFANTS RIVER

These aerial photos show the state of the Olifants river after the extremely polluted Selati river has joined it. This is the water that flows into KNP. We are fortunate to be upstream from Phalaborwa.

