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CHAIRMAN'S BLOG

BY
IAN OWTRAM

2010 has already flown by and it's hard to believe that we are already into March. It took me a while to decide what to write about this time round that would be different from the usual newsletter stuff and I decided that maybe I could recount what has happened in the 10 years since I came to live on the reserve. It would be remiss not to mention a few important management issues before getting onto the other subject though.

It is with regret that the two Maintenance workers, Michael and Colin, handed in their resignations at the end of February. This means that Timothy is short staffed again for the time being and that certain jobs will take that much longer now. They are currently busy with 2 major projects

1. Filling in the potholes on the tar road. So far most of the holes on the section towards the Olifants North reserve have been fixed. This road is always a priority as they are invoiced annually for a substantial amount of money and we need to show them their money is used for their benefit too.
2. Repairing and replacing the boundary fence between ourselves and Enyatikulu. With the one buffalo project no longer using plot 81 for their buffalo enclosures it has meant building a new fence and this is taking up quite a lot of time as well as finances. We are in the process of applying for permits to sell 2 buffalo bulls which will create some much needed funding for this project.

The tar road over Maggie's Hill is deteriorating beyond repair and the funds in the bank account are nowhere near enough to repair it at this stage. We need to look at other options that will be strong enough to withstand the heavy trucks that have led to the deterioration over the last 3 years. One option open to us will be to do a similar project as we did on Marble Hill with the the railway sleepers. However this will be costly and time

consuming, but it will probably be the most cost effective and durable option.

As we always say everything eventually comes down to money and as you will see in Mike's article, that is something that is in short supply this year so we ask everyone who has not paid yet to please dig deep in those pockets.

We have also spent some time trying to improve working conditions for the staff especially those at the gate. In order for them to be working within the legal framework of hours worked/month we will be looking to employ a 4th guard shortly. This will hopefully improve the security at the gate and the staff should be more alert due to working fewer hours on a daily basis. We have had a couple of break-ins reported recently and as security is one of those areas that affects us all, whether you live here or not, this should be incentive enough for you to contribute to the running costs of the reserve.

From a wildlife aspect, there have been some interesting sightings reported recently, if not confirmed. A young eland bull has been moving around the reserve for the past month. We have no idea where he came from but they are renowned for being accomplished fence jumpers. There was a possible sighting of an Aardwolf which would be an amazing addition to the species list. Hyena are becoming more vocal recently and it is always pleasing to hear them. The buffalo herd is growing rapidly and it is estimated that there may be over 70 animals in the herd due to the recent calving period. Lions were seen mating about a month back to so we may have some little cats back to so we may have some little cats running around in 2-3 months time alongside the Big Cats!

I came to live on Grietjie in January 2000 and I have seen some major changes in that time. When I first arrived here we had fences up all over the place. We had cattle, goats, pigs, chickens and all sorts of agricultural practices happening. We rarely saw





wild buffalo, lions or leopard and hyena were for all intents and purposes extinct. Jackal used to run from the vehicles before you even got within 200m of them. It really was not a game reserve at all.

However today is a very different story:-

We have resident lions, leopards and hyena, the buffalo herd is growing rapidly as I have already mentioned, the jackals sit on the side of the road and watch you go by and we often count 5-6 of them every morning on the way to school with my son. We probably have the best waterbuck viewing anywhere with 50-80 bachelors in a single herd on Dr Engelbrecht's property.

We only have one fenced off property left on the reserve and quite honestly the fence can not be described as anything more than a dangerous trip wire for animals and should really be removed, if only the owner would agree to do so.

We still have the odd shabeen unfortunately but the staff still need somewhere to buy food etc. However you will never deny them the odd drink here and there and as has been shown in the past 10 years if you close one down another will spring up somewhere else, so maybe it is better to know where they are and try and monitor their use, (albeit illegal most of the time). I think what is more important here is that as owners and employers we have the responsibility to educate and inform our staff of the risks associated now with living in a Big 5 reserve.

People come and go all the time and we are no different. I have lost count of the number of properties that have changed hands in 10 years, but what has happened is in the majority of cases those owners that have bought in have done so because they can see the potential for the reserve and are budding conservationists. We have very few of the old farmers left and

even Mr Trollip who was one of the cattle and goat farmers in those early days has now realized the change in direction and often stops and tells me of various wild animal sightings they now regularly have on their piece of land.

Sadly we still have a couple of owners who say they don't need Grietjie and are content to do things their own way. One of our objectives is to try and get as close to a 100% buy-in of the reserve and its policies so that we can try to manage the reserve with everyone's blessing. At the end of the day the value of each of your properties is increasing because of the perception outsiders now have of what we have managed to create over the past 10-15 years.

I would urge everyone to encourage your neighbours and friends to come on board because if we stand together we can only become a stronger and better reserve. If there are issues you have that prevent you from wanting to come on board, pick up the phone

or get in the car and come and speak to us. What we don't know we can't fix. There are only a few issues that can't be resolved in the end, in the majority of cases simple dialogue is all that it takes to break down perceived barriers and differences.

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is growing
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Buffalo herd on the southern (Olifants River) border of the reserve





FINANCE REPORT

MIKE JOSEPH

We were reaching a fairly critical stage in our finances. At of 1st March we had approximately 6 weeks of cash flow left. We have however since received part payment from ONGR so the immediate cash flow crunch is put aside for now. The ONGR receipts will largely be applied to road repairs. Therefore if as a community are to make it this financial year (and never mind the more strategic aspects of the Management Plan), we have again to make a very urgent appeal to those who have not yet paid their levies to do so as soon as possible.

Again we thank those who have paid their share and those who continue to make their monthly payments and contributions.

It would appear that good neighbourly negotiations will probably save the reserve a substantial amount of money in terms of the perimeter fence. We have received contributions from BLSA from the entrance fees at the Vulture restaurant. There is also an approved possibility of substantial funds from a buffalo swap however, the time horizon for these funds will be of the order of 4-8 months so these are not likely to impact this financial year's funds.

FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMERCIAL OPERATORS' COMMITTEE

As the new chairperson of the CAPS committee, I would like to say a few words about what is happening in the CAPS department.

A meeting was held in December, and since then I've been doing research on the legal requirements pertaining to the running of lodges, guesthouses etc. I have been visiting and getting to know the people, trying to find out what their ideas are, and how they see us working together in future. There hasn't been another CAPS meeting since December, since it is a bit of a challenge to find a date when all the members are actually on Grietjie and available for a meeting. But I feel that personal visits, where people can speak freely about their ideas and concerns, are more important than meetings.

I will do my best to try and get everyone's opinions, thoughts and ideas and put it forward to the Grietjie Committee. A few marketing strategies have been discussed, and I am following up on that. My hope and goal is that all the lodge and guest house owners will see their way open to work together for the benefit of all, whether CAPS or not. We are all in the same business, and we need each other in these tough times.

Maryn de Beer
Forever Resorts Tulani Safari Lodge



The 2010 Vehicle gate entry stickers are available from the entrance gate. The previously issued GREEN 2010 stickers are not going to be used and the new ORANGE 2010 stickers are to be used. Two stickers per plot will be issued and extra stickers can be purchased for R10.00 ea.

If you do not receive your stickers, please contact Timothy to arrange.

A WARM WELCOME TO THE NEW
OWNERS OF GRIETJIE NO 115,
MESSRS. SCOTT ELLIOT, DANIE PIO
AND THEIR FAMILIES

PROPERTY SALES

If you are looking to sell your property, please consider contacting Timothy before approaching an estate agent. Two local estate agents have offered to give commission back to the reserve if they sell the property that was referred by our warden.

Timothy can be contacted on: 078 875 8722.





Reflections...

ACCOUNT OF A DAY SPENT IN THE BUSH



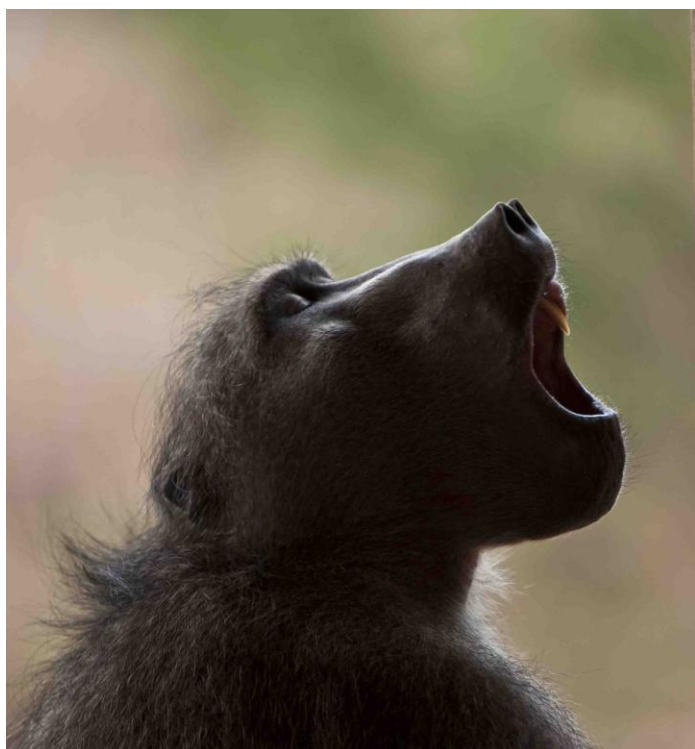
Sat in Whistler, Canada, at the Winter Olympic Games in the cold, fog, snow, rain, and occasional wonderful sunny days here in the mountains, Grietjie can seem a million miles away. But as I am a storyteller, Plot 8, Kiboko Khaya, Grietjie is never far from my thoughts. Rarely has there been a dull moment; escapades, sightings and tales are frequently conveyed to willing ears in animated words. So many of our friends or work mates now know about our little house in the South African bush and pretty much every one of them vows to visit us to enjoy the wonderful decking, and the land that surrounds it that is Grietjie - the site of so much activity, morning, noon and night. Africa's unique wildlife has never let us down yet.

I do often wonder if we (the residents of Grietjie) fully appreciate the amazing piece of Africa that we have on our doorstep. Because Phil and I do not spend our whole year living on Grietjie we take great pleasure in sharing what we have with others; we also log the animals and birds that we see during our visits. It is amazing to us that we have seen so much.

I would like to share with you, the reader of the Grietjie Newsletter, the wildlife that I recorded during one magical 24 hours spent on and around our decking.

SUNDAY 1st NOVEMBER 2009

Giraffe x 1 – sauntering past the decking nibbling away at the foliage, in the elegant and aloof way that only a giraffe can.



Trumpeter Hornbills x 4 – their unforgettable wailing call is something resembling the sound of a baby crying, and is firmly imprinted on the memory. Later, but not the same day we also saw a pair of ground hornbills, sharing with us their haunting booming call as they flew down the river to land on a tree on the south side. They are a very rare visitor and certainly a first for us on Grietjie.

Pied kingfisher x 2 – and mating at that – I certainly enjoyed photographing them! What a pleasure to watch their antics over the riverbank as they flitted around each other, the male definitely doing a great job in attracting the female. We had four resident in the vicinity during my two and a half month stay.

Brown Hooded kingfisher x 1 – A frequent visitor who on the day in question flew in and landed on a log just below the front decking. Happily he stayed long enough for me to grapple with my long lens and get a decent portrait.

Impala x several – were constant visitors before the rain came, they were certainly appreciating the greenery that lingered around the river at the time. I had not logged impala at the house before that day.

Bushbuck x 2 on this special day, but we do have a resident family who walk by at least three times per day. They are the first up in the morning and as the first light of a new day dawns I know that the male will soon be stealthily walking his well marked path across the front of the decking and up the bank on the right hand side.

Elephant x 3 – casually wandering down our steep drive, pausing to strip the branches of their leaves from a tree that grows between the carport and the decking. Then, with such a light step they gathered under a tree to have a dust bath.

I have begun to talk to these magnificent, enormous hulks. Happy as I am for them to take the leaves, even some of the bark, I now try very hard to ask them nicely not to destroy these precious and life-giving forces of nature – they bring vital life for both of us, so uprooting is not a favourable option. I swear that they have listened to me!!!





Burchell's coucal x 1. Maybe he sensed the long-awaited rain about to deluge on our little reserve. A massive storm was building up and would soon bring new life to the bush.

Waterbuck x 20 I counted coming down the bank to the right of the deck and crossing the river. What a wonderful site they were running through the shallows of the Olifants from north to the south side. The water splashing up behind them as they ran, proudly, heads held high and prancing, a bit like 'hack' ponies.

Fish Eagle x 1 – early in the morning, about 5.00am - clutching the 'catch of the day' in his huge talons. I watched him grapple with his prey until he flew off into a sycamore fig on the other side of the river.

Vervets - our resident troupe. They are always around and it is a rare day when we do not have a visit from them. Mischievous but so enjoyable, provided there is no food around, they are a true favourite of mine. I am of the opinion that there is no better parent of any species than the vervet. And those babies – so adventurous and playful, looking like little old men gradually growing younger by the day.

Bearded woodpecker x 1. Hammering away on the dead tree that is right next to the decking, this also was a first sighting for me.

Little Sparrowhawk x 1 – masterfully tearing into his prey in a tree close by. We have seen him regularly around our plot, so clearly there is plenty of potential food for him right on our doorstep.

And still within this 24-hour period:

Elephant x 5. Probably the three from the morning, now with two other bulls for extra company, came back much later in the day. Two young bulls of very similar size begin to spar with each other, and head into the river for a real scrap.



I spent well over an hour photographing them as they head butted and trunk tangled each other in the water, running, splashing and sparring, right up to dusk and on into darkness. Initially I was unsure if this was a serious altercation, but after watching for a very long time, I definitely got the feeling that it was a 'boys game'. Even when it was completely dark I could still hear them carrying on and in the morning they were still in the vicinity.



Common Duiker x 1 – nervously passing through, in a wary staccato action.

Warthog x 3 – It is always such a pleasure for me to reunite with our resident warthogs, which have resolutely refused to budge even while the house was being built. I swear the whole bank at the back of the house will collapse one day as the labyrinth of tunnels is complex and enormous. They even burrowed under our driveway, causing it to collapse. We have now given them a concrete tunnel to use!

They have bred again this year and at the beginning of December I spotted five miniatures. What charismatic creatures they are and I am sure we witnessed their first outing, late one Saturday afternoon when they came out to play, running everywhere, turning somersaults, knocking into each other, while their parents enjoyed the fresh grass by our concrete table and bench. That sighting will live in my memory forever. No photos of this episode as I just could not bear to disturb them, but simply stood mesmerised by their antics watching from inside the house.

In that 24 hours I was impressed with my list, while certain I missed a whole lot more. Where was the bush snake that I have spotted a couple of times, where were the baboons – that caused havoc for several weeks, and raided my car; the banded mongoose family that we know live in the bank and have been seen playing outside on several occasions; the crocodiles and hippos that are so often to be seen in the river – at night we have had three hippos walking right by the decking; the purple lourie (now the purple turaco), such a magnificent bird, that also visits regularly; the kudu, such sensitive and beautiful antelope, that came down to the river in quite a little herd for food when it was so dry.

Do we fully appreciate that we have such a wealth of wildlife around us? I truly hope that we do. Nature is delicate and the balance of it more so. It is something that we must conserve whatever the cost.

Phil and I travel the world, and we feel so privileged that we own a small part of this unique and diminishing part of the planet – long live the Grietjie Constitution for aiming to maintain this splendid part of the world, hard as that maybe we must never give up the fight.

**Text and photographs by
Trish Liggett, Kiboko Khaya, No. 8 Grietjie Nature Reserve**





WARDENS REPORT

Timothy Hedges

'Happy New Year, and may 2010 be a good one', well it seems those were the words spoken just the other day. It is already the end of February and the year is flying by. I hope everyone had good Christmas and New Year celebrations. I was lucky enough to spend it with my family (which I hadn't seen for a while), and after all the celebrations we are all looking a bit plumper.

In the March 2009 newsletter I supplied a map of our reserve, showing the boundaries of all the properties within GNR. This time I have included a map of Balule Nature Reserve. GNR forms part of BNR as well as the other reserves listed on the map. The area size of BNR is almost 40 000ha of which GNR is 3 000ha.

From a security point of view there has been an increase in problems occurring on GNR. The end of January saw a house broken into and just recently, end of February saw another house broken into. The end of February also saw me dismiss my two maintenance staff who were also suspected of partaking in a bit of illegal activity (of a different type), which I will not tolerate on my team. Due to these incidents happening, I will be increasing security measures on GNR, and I ask all residents on GNR to be patient as we iron out

any teething problems that may occur as we implement these measures, which will only increase the safety of all owners and their property, on the reserve. Holiday homes or weekend homes are always a soft target when someone knows they are empty. People walking around on our roads can see the movements of visiting owners and as soon as the owner leaves their home empty, the thieves have plenty of time to find a way into the house. Please try and limit the amount of walking around your staff has to do, not only from their safety point of view, but from a security point of view as well.

As mentioned in the last newsletter, GNR has got a computer now and I am connected to the big bad web. So now there are various ways that we can communicate and please use any of the following to communicate with me, Be it a "how is GNR?" or a complaint or some form of information. I would appreciate hearing from you. I can be contacted as follows:

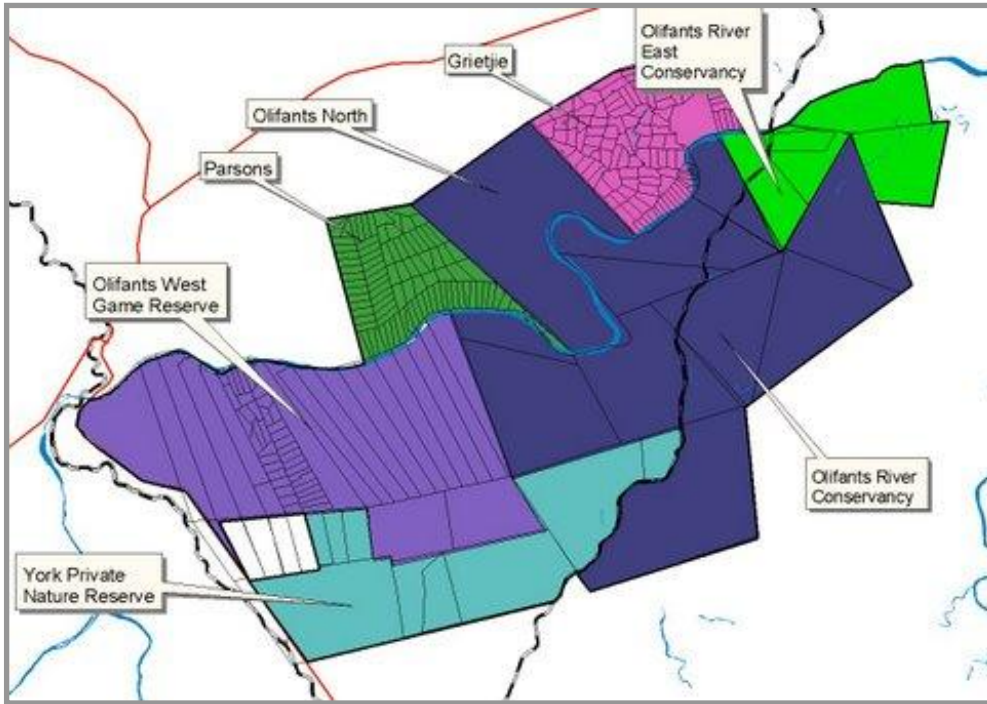
Warden, Grietjie Nature Reserve
P.O. Box 1348 / Plot 64
Phalaborwa Limpopo 1390 South Africa
Cell: 078 8758 722 **Fax/Email:** 086 591 8478
Skype: gnrwarden
E mail: warden@grietjiepnr.co.za
Web Page: www.grietjiepnr.co.za



In the beginning of December 2009, a truck with a heavy load of sand lost control coming down Maggie's Hill and ended up on its side. Luckily no one was injured and no other vehicles were involved. The road worthiness of these vehicles is questionable, and then with a load (even overloaded), they become a risk to every one on the roads. Please drive carefully on this section of the road, as there are a few blind corners and rises.

February has been a very maintenance filled month. (I feel more like a Foreman than a Warden.) We have been busy doing a lot of tarring on the roads and when the weather is not good, we have been busy doing the fencing along our





BALULE NATURE RESERVE

REGIONAL MAP

boundary. We have also been working on the staff compound and have put up the much needed electric fence to keep the big nasties out. Now that I am two maintenance men short it might be a good time to catch up on some conservation work around the reserve. There has been a large decrease in the amount of litter on the reserve. Either it has decreased or it is all hiding in the long grass and just waiting for winter before rearing its ugly head. I believe it is a decrease, and a much needed one. Beer bottles are almost none existent.

Game deaths have also been few. I know of the following deaths over this period-two pythons (on the roads), a waterbuck, juvenile elephant (taken by a crocodile in the river), old male giraffe, an impala and a skinny buffalo. The lions have been making a lot of noise across the river lately and have been seen a few times by myself and owners. I think they are waiting for the river to drop a little more and then they will pay us a visit. Our buffalo herd has also increased in size, and my head ranger reports 94. This is just under double of what it was. We also had a surprise visit by a single Eland. It is not known where it came from, but is a first for GNR.

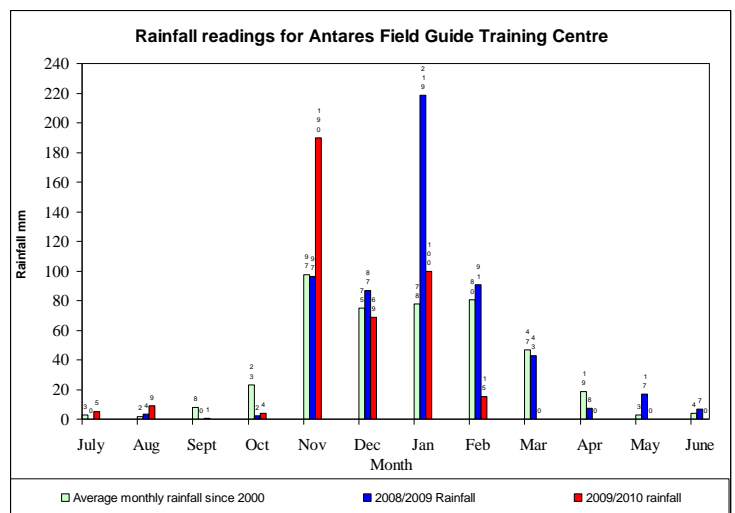
The rain has been good and we received 75mm in December 09, 138.5mm in January 10 and 11mm in February 10. This rain has been good for the veld and the green is only now starting to show signs of dying. If we could get just a bit more, I think the winter will be good

for the animals although it is predicted to be a bad one again.

I have received the 'Ecological monitoring for the APNR 2009' report done by Dr M. Peel from ARC. If anyone would like to see this they are more than welcome to contact me and we can make a plan for you to see it.

Poaching on the reserve is low and only old snares found. The Mopane worms were very few and far between, although it is said that all the usual 'plagues' that we normally get annually, have been very mild compared to other years. Even the Marulas have been few.

Well, that is all for now. I hope the rest of the year is good and that you have many good sightings on GNR.





Common Eland

(Tragelaphus oryx)

My family and I had great pleasure in seeing Africa's biggest antelope, the Eland on Grietjie back in January, so I thought this would make a good subject to write about, as I am sure a few more of you have seen him by now. We don't know where he came from but it's lovely to have him visit us and lets hope he decides that Grietjie is a nice habitat in which to stay however it would be good for him to have some other Eland companions as they are a herd animal!

As said the Eland is Africa's largest bovid species with a full grown male weighing in at 450-942kg! And standing at a height of 150-183cm. The females are a little lighter and shorter. They carry a pair of beautiful horns with either 1 or 2 spirals. The female of this species has the longer but thinner horns and can reach up to 51-69.6cm. They have a relatively short head with small ears and a prominent dewlap and are covered in short smooth tan fur, however the colour can vary geographically and males will turn a blue grey colour with age and young are reddish brown. If ever you have seen an eland up close you may be able to hear a fascinating clicking sound, which is difficult to pinpoint. It is believed that the sound comes from between the hooves when the animal is walking. Their hooves splay out when they touch the ground to create a larger surface area to sustain this large antelope, this results in them snapping shut and producing an audible click when lifted!

The eland is one of the most adaptable ruminants with very varied habitat preferences; it only avoids swamps, forests and deserts. This results in it being both a browser and grazer and in the rainy season it's diet is 50-80% grass. Eland will browse mainly foliage but will also eat fruit, seeds, seedpods, herbs, and tubers. Elands will use their horns to break off high branches to get to out-of-reach

foliage. These large antelope have to feed for long hours to sustain their body mass and will happily feed both day and night depending on seasonal temperatures.

The eland is typically a herd animal forming some of the largest herds seen in other spiral horned antelope. The herds are very open and interchangeable with the calves and mothers forming the closest bonds. The home ranges of eland varies with the females and calves having the largest of up to 422 km² in some areas however the bulls will range only 13-60 km².

Elands are the slowest antelope and runs no faster than 40 kph and will tire very quickly but it can maintain a fast trot of 22 kph indefinitely. They are however very good jumpers and can jump 3m high fences from standing!

Mating usually occurs during the rains and after a gestation of 8-9 months births peak at the end of the dry season. The calves are either hidden alone for up to 2 weeks or join a crèche a few days after birth. Juveniles have a very close knit relationship and will not go further than 50yds from each other. These groups may often be seen lagging behind the herd and the formation of splinter groups can be seen in the mothers especially at 4-6 months after weaning.

Lions and spotted hyena are a major predator of the eland however mothers will confront lions and bulls show little to no fear of predators!

Lets hope our eland manages to evade the lions and sticks around for some time!

MEL OWTRAM

Ref:
Richard Estes. 1999. *The Safari Companion*. Russell Friedman Books
Trevor Carnaby. 2006. *Beat about the Bush*. Jacana Media

