



# Words from the Warden

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Due to the late rains, the veld condition is still not good. I spent more time in the bush with the Field Rangers and after a discussion with a land **owner** regarding the elephants destroying marula trees, I focused more on young marula trees in the veld. Although the bush was open with minimal grass, it was difficult to find young Marulas from 300mm up to half a meter. In certain areas I found marula trees that had survived and were approx. 1.2 m and two meters high. After the rain I counted more than 30 seedlings in my garden but hardly any in the bush. A marula tree takes about 15 years to bear fruit. Elephants help to distribute the seeds. It seems survival rates in the bush are low due to drought, rodents, warthogs and other animals eating the seeds or maybe any other reason we are not aware of. This is all assumption and a real study monitoring the marula growth in the bush would be the way to provide real answers to this question.

Dr. Michelle Henley, Elephant Ecologist, and Craig Spence visited Gabi and me and we discussed the possibility of certain properties being part of her studies of elephant exclusion zones. Some projects like this have had the desired effect in northern Africa – I doubt it will work here but let's see.

## Sick, injured and problem animals

The Doreen fence was damaged three times by an elephant crossing to and fro. Three impalas were killed in the fence. On #81 two impalas trapped between the two fences were reported by Blackie and we had to cut an opening in the one fence to release them. One lioness and a zebra were found dead in ONGR.

## Fences

I removed the 300 meters of old game fence between 102, 103, 104 as well as a few old fencing poles next to the road. This took a few days. The trees had grown through the fence and that made it very difficult to remove the wire.

Thanks to Natie for the poison to spray the fence lines. I will start this next week.

All the faults this month on the fence lines were caused by impala and one bull elephant.

## Safety and Security

There were no thefts or housebreaks or any other crime reported to me during December.

The warning received from KNP regarding rhino poaching was taken seriously with the result that one rhino poacher is now behind bars. This happened on Christmas day. Of the three poachers, the remaining two crossed the Olifants river into Grietjie and out at #109 into Doreen. We covered the river from #117 almost up to the water board acting on info given to the police by the poacher in custody. However the two sidestepped us and escaped through Grietjie – what can I say – next time brother!!

David, #33, reported a strange man on his properties and described the person as one who "lives in the bush". As soon as the man was spotted he fled.

There were other sightings of strange people in that area and in the area of plots 10 – 33. The fact that we do not have a road on the Grietjie/Olifants North cutline makes it difficult to patrol – a problem to look into in the future.

Col. Frik Fourie visited me and we had another meeting in town.

## Warnings sent out

Thanks to Maxine for all the hard work to get messages out to owners.

From time to time I send warnings out through Grietjecomms to all landowners. We will never shout wolf, wolf and if a warning is sent out it is to inform owners of a real threat or any noteworthy situation. Grietjie is like any other community, city, town or country. We have people from both sides of the railway line and both sides of the oceans. Most owners are thankful for the information updates concerning a situation, some offer assistance, other owners act strangely. Thanks to Glynn, #100, and Jan, 22 Casart Lodge, who helped at observations posts and the tar road.

Please see these warnings in a positive light. Not all information is for public ears but I strongly believe it is the right of every owner to know the status of our reserve. I am happy to receive any inputs, suggestions – I am available by phone.

## Staff

Michael, Field Ranger, went off and did not return. Protrack and other companies constantly lose good people to other organizations that offer more money for trained staff. I suggested to Blackie and Mike that we not replace him immediately but rather take the time to look for a good guy. ONGR only has one field ranger at this stage and they are also looking to hire.

The mambas had a Christmas party at Mica on 19<sup>th</sup> December while the Balule Wardens had a get together at Three Bridges. Thanks to the donors for making this possible.

### Owner's staff

The new ID badges are being issued by Protrack now. They screen all staff before issuing the badges. Please ensure that all your staff has valid ID cards or they will not be permitted to enter the reserve. Please leave your application forms with a passport or ID copy and a photograph at the gate. If a staff member leaves your employ, please hand his/her badge back to the gate and inform the gate staff that he/she will no longer reside on Grietjie. This is to make Grietjie a safer place for everyone.

The Municipal evaluator visited Grietjie and I sent him Hendrik with him to visit properties. He only managed to view a few properties in the one day he had allocated to Grietjie. He moved on to Silonque the following day.

### Vehicle

The bakkie tyres are worn and need to be replaced. The right front window fell into the door again and a new mechanism has been ordered – it is made of plastic and cannot be repaired.

### Game drives and sightings

We had good sightings of lion and leopard reported this month as well as more than 12 wild dogs close to the gate. Hyena were seen and heard nearly every night on the eastern side of the reserve. A python was seen on the Darisandi road close to #76.

### Anti-poaching

The 5 ONGR mambas have moved into the Rondavel picket. Jason will spend a week with them. As soon as the Rhino Boma picket on ONGR is finished they will move to Olifants North. In the interim I plan to use them on Olifants North, Grietjie and Doreen as well as for road blocks. One rhino poacher has been in custody since Christmas day after a multi-agency operation.

### Cyclone

We had a freak storm/cyclone that did a lot of damage in a small area of Grietjie. Trees were uprooted and blocked the roads. Blackie measured 70mm rain at his house. The storm ripped roofs and sections of roofs off at 45, 54, 80 and 76. The wind and rain passed through relatively quickly and the Swartspruit flowed for a short while as a result of the cloudburst. Theunis, #45, and his grandchildren helped me to remove trees from the roads with the tractor. (Thanks Theunis!)