



NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2015



Photographer: Loek Bleeker

“We encourage owners to send their best Grietjie photographs to grietjiecomms@gmail.com and we will, with your permission, post the best photograph on the cover of our monthly newsletter”

CHAIRMAN’S REPORT by Marius Porteus

Fellow Grietjie owners,

As you will recall the Grietjie Private Nature Reserve annual general meeting was held on 29 August 2015 and was well attended by signed up members. This year’s AGM must certainly go down as one of the smoothest since inception. This is proof of consensus amongst members on progress, priorities and strategy and that we are maturing as a private nature reserve and moving closer to official nature reserve status.

We therefore thank and congratulate Hans Schmid and the outgoing committee of 2014/15 for a job well done and for Johan Grobler and the Grietjie staff for serving Grietjie well the past year. We also wish our new Reserve Manager, Gerrie van Zyl all the best with his new responsibilities.

Subsequent to the August AGM the new elected committee for 2015/16 held the first committee meeting on Saturday 12 September and the portfolios for 2015/16 was finalised and is presented in the table below:

Name	Capacity	Address	Contact number	e-mail	Resident
Marius Porteus	Chairman	Grietjie 96	083 235 5685	mariusp@foskor.co.za	No
Michael Kristensen	Vice Chairman, Owner Liaison	Grietjie 109	073 468 3522	mail@mbizi.dk	Yes
Loek Bleeker	Treasurer	Grietjie . 110	+27767721457 (RSA)	gntreasurer@gmail.com	No
Co-opted: Marilda Wiegand	Secretary, Editor	Tenant, Grietjie 85	082 906 3585	marilda@bushveldterrace.co.za	Yes
Jan Caspers	CARE, CAP's, Security	Grietjie 22	0716364323	johanniscaspers@gmail.com	Yes
Pierre Ackermann	Infrastructure, Roads	Grietjie 75	082 852 1371	ackermannhoutwerke@gmail.com	No
Mike Clulow	Human Capital	Grietjie 54	082 493 9523	clulowm@lantic.net	No
Co-opted: Gerrie van Zyl	Reserve Manager	Grietjie 94/95	079 034 5917 warden	grietjiewarden@gmail.com	Yes
Marc van der Walt	Grietjie Comms & Newsletter	Grietjie 43	078 127 1244	Marcrijn59@gmail.com	No
Geo Olivier	Special Projects	Grietjie 59	083 627 3117	Geo@lantic.net	No
Paul Venter	Special Projects	Grietjie 67	082 660 2701	osebeni@vodamail.co.za	No

The following Grietjie members will also render support to the committee.

Name	Capacity	Address	Contact number	e-mail	Resident
Blackie de Swardt	Relieve Reserve Manager, Maintenance	Grietjie 81	082 968 1311	laumelinda@vodamail.co.za	Yes
Theunis Trollip	Roads	Grietjie 45	082 492 4712 072 258 8871	theunistrollip76@gmail.com	Yes

On behalf of all the Grietjie members we thank you for your willingness to serve on the committee. The new committee members are literary from all corners of the country and world and we will have to embrace technology to allow us to communicate and function properly.

Primary objective for 2015/16

The objectives will be to ensure we uphold the Grietjie constitution. However, listening to comments made by members at the AGM, I have extracted the following as focus areas for the committee for 2015/16 although not limited to these:

Access control:

Safety and security should be priority and through reliable access control we can go a long way to achieve this. The new committee will work on initiatives to improve this further. The Grietjie Balule entrance is the face of Grietjie to visitors and we want them to have a “wow” experience. This is after all one of the “entrances” to the Greater Kruger National Park area.

Roads:

For many this is most probably one of the most important requirements and I agree. We can only enjoy our environment if we can get around too. Major portions of our internal tar roads are deteriorating and we need to do something or lose it. At this stage it is still an asset although costs are increasing to maintain it. Careful consideration will be given on the way forward. With new equipment purchased during 2014/15 we should be in a better position to maintain the internal gravel roads too. Unfortunately better roads also lead to some misuse. Speeding in the reserve is a concern. The committee will also attempt to make all road users more aware of speed limits and the danger this poses to animals. We urge owners their guests and contractors to respect speed limits.

The aesthetics:

When driving through Grietjie we all want to get that feeling you are surrounded by untouched nature. Since the early 2000, committees have done a lot to remove the unsightly and we would like to continue with this. The committee has already agreed to address the "borrow pit" or soil excavation pit on Maggie's Hill where soil was removed to maintain roads. It was decided that this will be rehabilitated as best we can and that no more excavation pits will be made next to game viewing roads. Ruins and other unsightly man made structure visible from the game viewing roads will with permission of owners be removed or made less visible.

Growing the member base:

As Hans Schmid has indicated in the August chairpersons' report, signed up members is at an all-time high. This is however not sufficient to one day obtain Nature Reserve status and we as committee will continue to engage and encourage non-member owners and new owners to sign up to the Grietjie constitution.

General feedback

We kindly requests owners to not allow staff to wonder outside of controlled areas for their own safety. We have encountered staff walking on the reserve and this after sunset. Please make your staff aware of the risk of wild animals.

We also encourage owners to engage with Jan Caspers to ensure their employees are issued with ID tags. This will help the gate guards to ensure only authorised people enter the reserve. Jan Caspers can be contacted with regards to "name tags" for staff.

On a more positive note, we are looking forward to summer to arrive and trust the recent good early spring rain will bring some relief to what has been a very dry 2014/15 summer and winter so far.

We also want to welcome the new owners of plot 104, Tony Marques to the Grietjie family and wish them many happy years in the bush.

We have also appointed a new Grietjie staff member, Tshepo Shai. He has been appointed as gate guard and also has experience as ranger. We are looking forward to his positive contribution.

Upcoming meetings are the Balule Committee meeting that is taking place in October and will be hosted by Olifants North Game Reserve.

As in the past we will continue to update you through the monthly newsletter on progress made on committed projects, safety, security and matters concerning you as members. We want to encourage two way communications between members and the committee so please make use of our community email grietjiecomms@gmail.com or by contacting any of the committee members on the numbers provided in the table above.

MUNICIPAL RATES & TAXES by H Schmid

Please be advised that the municipality has changed the tariff on the July 2015 invoices. Whereas some of the fortunate ones may have paid the lesser tariff in the past, the majority only had their tariff reduced as of 1 July 2015. Zoning has been retained as agricultural.

If you divide by the annual levy (bottom right hand side of invoice) by the valuation of your property a factor of 0.0025 (or 0, 25%) should be the correct answer. The annual levy is divided by 12 to give you the invoiced monthly "property rate".

As we have been requesting the municipality that the rate of 0, 25% be applicable to all Grietjie properties that are used for residential purposes and they have now applied the correct rate, we encourage that all Grietjie owners now to pay their current invoices based on this 0, 25%.

To those that have been charged a higher rate in the past (I am one of them) there is the problem in sorting out the arrear account that attracts an interest charge every month. I have submitted a letter to the Municipal Manager requesting that the current tariff be backdated and that I be given a credit for the "overcharge". I was advised that I should have an answer from his office within 2 weeks. I submitted this letter on 9 September and will inform you of the outcome.

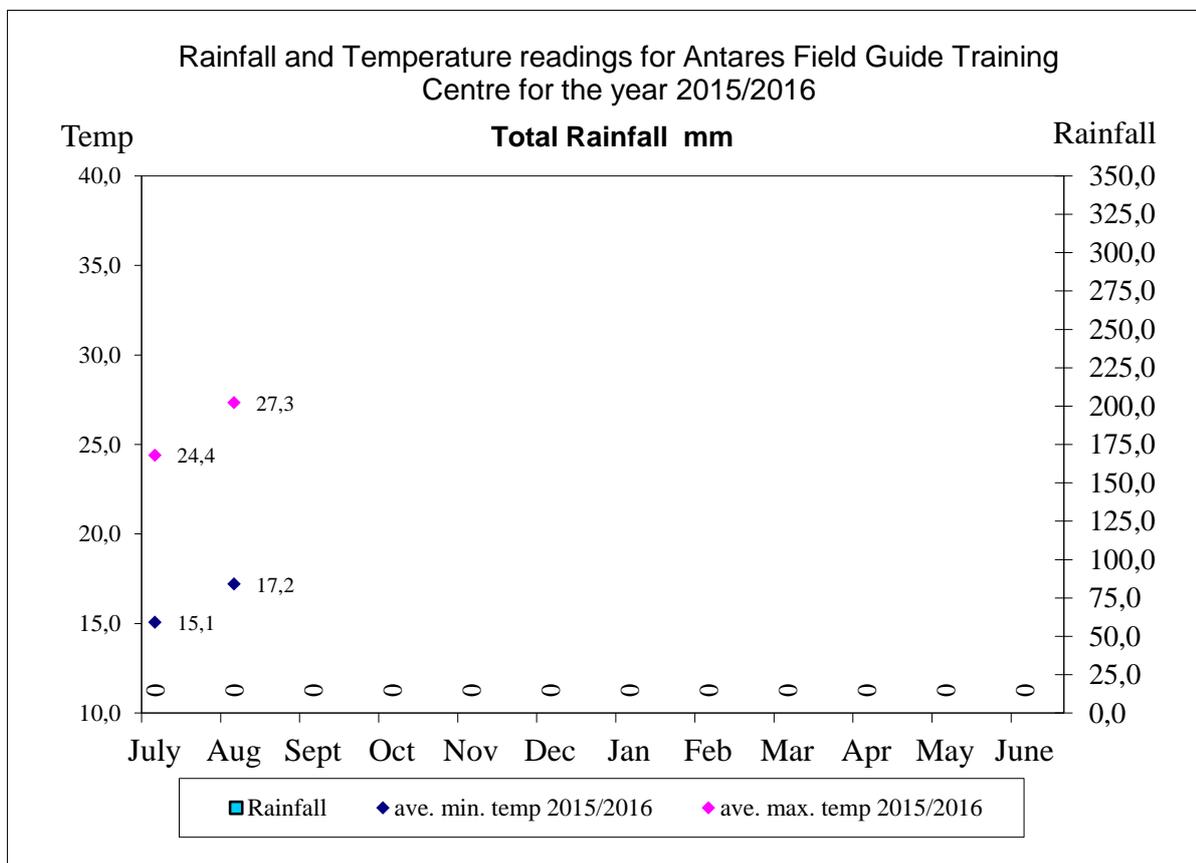
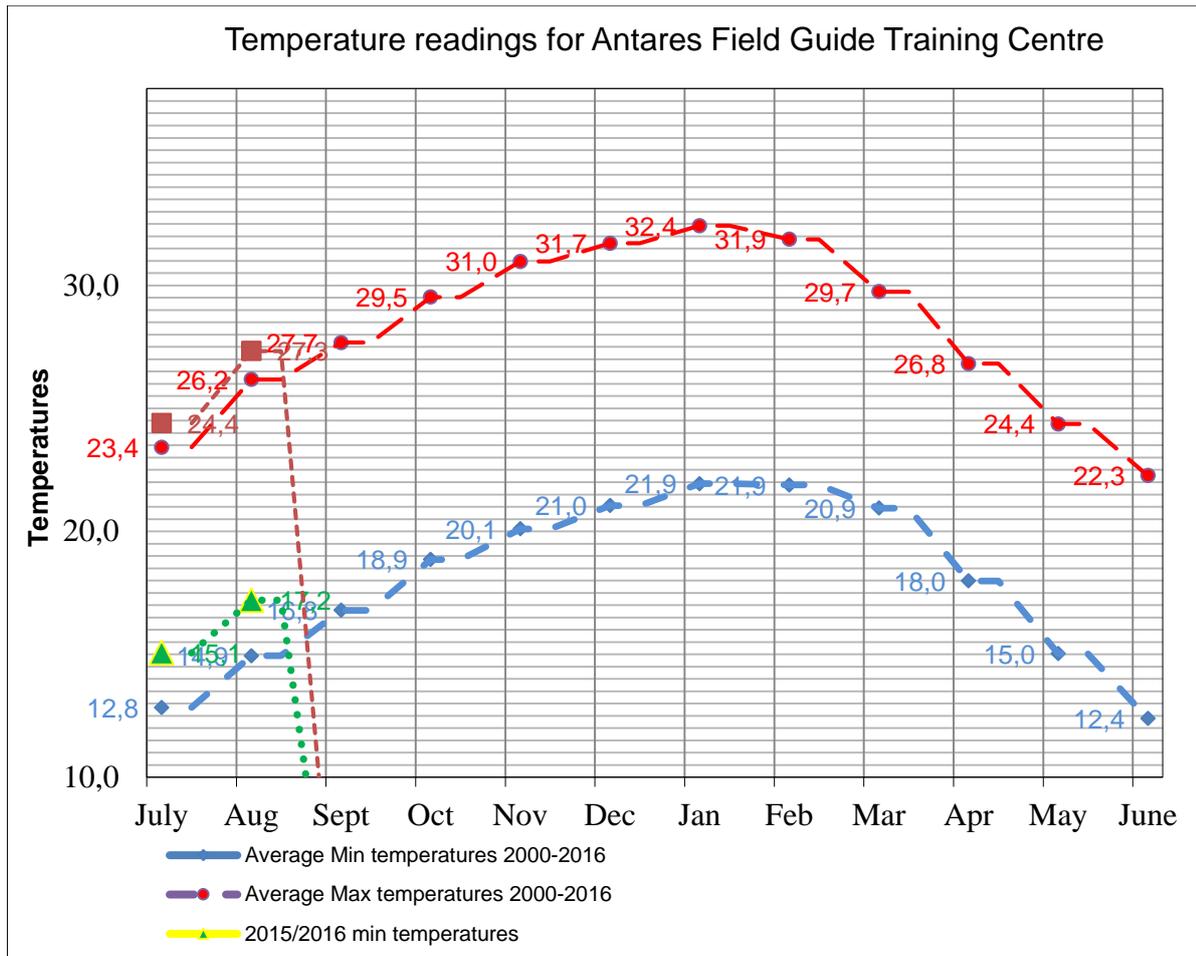
WARDEN'S REPORT by Gerrie van Zyl

We were blessed with good rain on Friday 4th and Saturday 5th September. A total of 36mm fell in this time. The Elephants are a handful due to the drought. The Elephant with the injured leg is recovering well and we are monitoring it closely.

The rangers moved into their new accommodation on plot 64 which is an improvement from what was previously used. It is our intension to improvements this further to make their accommodation more comfortable. We interviewed 2 candidates for the vacant gate guard position and I am pleased to announce that we have appointed one candidate, Tsepho Shai. He has started on 15 September.

The game count revealed a migration of mainly waterbuck to Olifants North from us because of more grass.

RAINFALL AND TEMPERATURE STATS by Ian Owtram



GET TO KNOW THE GRIETJIE STAFF by Marc van der Walt

This month we welcome and introduce two new staff members, Dennis and Tshepo.



Dennis

Dennis has been employed as a ranger. He obtained a Gr 12 & level 4 ABET certification and he resides in Namakgale, Phalaborwa. He has previous ranger experience gained at Crock-Ranch.



Tshepo

Tshepo has been employed as a gate guard / ranger. He obtained a Gr 10 qualification and he resides in Lenyenye, Tzaneen. He has previous ranger, tracker, skinning and driver experience gained at Mafigeni Safari Lodge .

NEWSWORTHY ARTICLES

Article from The Eagle's Eye Newsletter, Endangered Wildlife Trust Birds of Prey Programme, August 2015.

An Introduction to the K2C Hooded Vulture Project

In February this year I received an email from the GreenMatter Trust, saying I'd been awarded a postdoctoral fellowship to study Hooded Vultures. Three months later, I relocated from Pietermaritzburg to Hoedspruit, in my new study area: the Kruger-to-Canyons Biosphere Reserve. This reserve comprises 2.6 million ha, and travelling throughout this area would be a sharp contrast to how I had spent all of my working hours over the last three years; in a single building, studying the metabolic rate of Cape White-eyes for my PhD. I was thrilled at the prospect of doing fieldwork again, and in some of the most beautiful reserves in South Africa.

Hooded Vultures (*Necrosyrtes monachus*) are widespread throughout Africa, but are threatened by habitat loss, poisoning, and the illegal muthi trade. Their numbers have declined dramatically in the last 50 years and their global population is currently regarded as endangered. Yet, there are very few studies one can find about these birds, so there is a need to understand their basic biology if we are to protect and conserve them.

The K2C Hooded Vulture Project will focus primarily on Hooded Vultures' movements (i.e. where do juveniles disperse to, and how much of their time do adults and juveniles stay within protected areas?), as well as their nest site selection and breeding biology, and their feeding ecology (how do they interact with other scavengers at food sources, and is anthrax a threat to them?).



Lindy on a nest survey in KNP_Photo by John Davies

My collaborators in the K2C Hooded Vulture Project include André Botha, the Endangered Wildlife Trust's (EWT) Birds of Prey Programme Manager, Dr Campbell Murn of the Hawk Conservancy Trust in the UK, Dr Keith Bildstein of the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in the USA, and Prof Colleen Downs, my supervisor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

My first meeting with André Botha in May was cut short when he received a call that an elephant had been electrocuted on a fence in Phalaborwa. The reserve manager had dragged the carcass to a nearby vulture restaurant, and André and I spent the afternoon observing the White-backed, Hooded and Lappetfaced Vultures as they squabbled and jostled for food. The next day, André and I were continuing with our meeting, when he received another call, this time informing him of a poisoning at a farm near Hoedspruit. An hour later we were at the site, collecting dry wood to burn the carcasses and sterilise the site; 65 vultures and one Tawny Eagle had been killed in a single poisoning. Samples were taken to the state vet for toxicology analysis, and then we burned every single bird. There was only one Hooded Vulture at the site, a juvenile.



Hooded Vulture nest contents Photo by Lindy Thompson & John Davies

Since then, I have been incredibly lucky to access some truly stunning areas for my fieldwork. In June I joined a team of volunteers on the 5-day Pels Fishing Owl survey along the Olifants River in the Kruger National Park, where I paid special attention to the Hooded Vultures I saw along the way. In July I joined another group on their 3-day Pels Fishing Owl survey in the Grietjie/Olifants Game Reserves. Not only was I able to locate a number of Hooded Vultures and their nests, I was also fortunate to have 5 sightings of Pels Fishing Owls, something most birders only dream of. As you can probably tell, I am really enjoying my fieldwork, and the travelling and networking it involves.

I am also extremely grateful to the managers and land owners who have granted me land access, some have even provided accommodation and staff to assist me on walks and/or drives while searching for Hooded Vulture nests.

This project would not be possible without their help. So a big thank-you to the following for their assistance: the Agricultural Research Council; Cleveland Game Reserve; **Grietjie Private Nature Reserve**; Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate; Kapama Private Game Reserve; Klaserie Private Game Reserve; Lawson's Birding, Wildlife and Custom Safaris; Makalali Private Game Reserve; Ndlopfu Private Game Reserve; Ndlovumzi Nature Reserve; Nstiri Game Reserve; Olifants North Game Reserve; Umbabat Game Reserve; Pidwa Game Reserve; Selati Private Game Reserve; Timbavati Game Reserve; Tulloh Farm; Ukhhozi Game Reserve; and UniFattoria Farm.

In the last 2 months, with the help of various landowners and volunteers, I have located 40 Hooded Vulture nests, 16 of which are active. Hooded Vultures generally breed along rivers in Jackalberries or Matumis, in stick nests positioned 15-20m above the ground. Despite various suggestions of how to reach the nest (including 'let me just winch you up'), and to the amusement of some wardens, I decided to do a tree climbing course, to enable me to climb trees safely with ropes and a harness, to install cameras at nests. This will allow me to monitor the birds' breeding with minimal disturbance, and the cameras can be removed after the chicks have fledged. In the coming weeks I hope to install camera traps at various Hooded Vulture nests and also at vulture restaurants, to monitor their feeding biology.

The project will continue until January 2018, when many of the questions we are asking will have been answered, and we will be able to provide information on Hooded Vulture movements and biology to all of the landowners in the study area, to inform species management plans within protected areas. In the meantime, if anyone has Hooded Vulture nests on their properties, please get in touch with me by e-mail at lindoiano@yahoo.com.

Lindy Thompson

Postdoctoral Researcher

University of KwaZulu-Natal