



NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2016



Submitted by: Cherelle

"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"

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT by Marius Porteus

Grietjie remains dry and nature is going its course. Elephants do what they do but this is nature. On a visit to Grietjie recently, it was so nice to see the numerous warthog families with the new piglets and I was thinking, what a privilege we have to own property here.

What we know as "Grietjie Private Nature Reserve", was born 20 years ago (1996 – 2016).

How many of you can still remember or know where Grietjie Private Reserve all started? I went into the archives provided by Mike Clulow to look for the answer. On 24 September 1996, the then Chair of Balule, Andy Dott called a meeting with the owners North of the Olifants river i.e. Parsons, Grietjie, Magdalena and other. The AGENDA: "Why do you not become part of Balule?". 38 Land owners attended and the majority supported the proposal to become part of Balule and the rest fiercely rejected. This meeting was held at Tulani Lodge. The first committee was formed and not surprisingly, 20 years later you will still find the majority on Grietjie today, fully committed i.e. Tertia Engelbrecht, Theuns Trollip, Mike Clulow, Gert Lubbe and none other than our Reserve Manager Gerrie van Zyl.

The first Chairperson was Jack Colenso from Mfubu Lodge who passed away a few years ago, Vice – Chair was Andre de Klerk from Tulani Lodge whom has also sadly passed away and secretary was Tertia Engelbrecht. Parsons was represented on the committee by Mr van Reenen and the other member was John Burchmore. What a privilege to, after 20 years, have three of the founding members of Grietjie Private Nature Reserve on the committee today as member or co-opted i.e. Mike Clulow, Gerrie van Zyl and Theuns Trollip. The first levy statements were sent out on 1 December 1996 and Mike Clulow was invoiced R678 for the year.

20 Years later and we are continuing to improve and making Grietjie a better place. You are at the right place!

Finances

We had good a response after the request in January's newsletter for owners and members to contribute and pay levies. Thank you. The remainder of the off takes for the 2015/16 season was also done in February and our financial position has improved and trust with regular monthly levy contributions we will safely see through the financial year and also successfully complete the identified projects for 2015/16.

If this is not good enough news we were also blessed with a financial donation from Ian Black to assist with the perimeter fence upkeep. Ian, many thanks on behalf of all the members. This donation will be spent wisely.

Access control and Security

No incidents of crime were reported in February. A poacher with snares was however caught that had gained access through our perimeter fence. As mentioned previously, the committee is very concerned about the safety of individuals walking to and from the security gate to private properties. It might be the exception to the rule but we need to find a way to prevent this from happening. Practical solutions to resolve this will be debated at the next committee meeting. We urge members and owners to be responsible and not allow staff to walk to and from the main gate. Drop them off and collect them at the Grietjie gate. For non-resident members, we will come up with a proposal how to ensure your resident staff get transported safely.

Grietjie Staff

With the help of Hans Schmid and the owners of Plot 64 we will soon start with the upgrade of kitchen facilities at the staff quarters. We want to again thank Sakkie van Rooyen for their generous support in this regard.

Mike Clulow has also started with the process to register the Grietjie Security activities as an in house security provider as required by law.

Roads

Gravel roads are in a fair state and with the little rain around no significant wash-a-ways have occurred. With the assistance of Hans Schmid two speed humps were installed on the main gravel road between the gate and crossing. Proper chevrons will be installed soon to clearly make these more visible.

We will start with the tar road test project as soon as the day temperature has dropped. We have been advised by the specialist not to apply the tar seal in the current high day temperature since this could jeopardise the whole test process. Everything, however, is in place to start the project.

Fences and Infrastructure

With the donation made by Ian Black for fence maintenance we can now proceed with the second phase of the fence project. The focus will be on the Doreen fence for now which will include replacement of the energiser.

Gerrie and his team are continuing to remove old redundant infrastructure. If you have old fence posts, old outer buildings / ruins or whatever infrastructure that is an eyesore, please contact him to see how we can assist to have this removed.

Elephants continue to damage direction boards and other road signs. Please be patient, Gerrie will fix or replace these. It is now a continuous activity.

Game and Vegetation

Veld conditions are deteriorating with grass disappearing fast. Despite this we still see new-borns. Please refrain from feeding animals.

During the patrols done by the rangers an old snare with water back remains was found and a poacher was caught with a snared impala. The individual was arrested.

In Balule South a rhino was also killed by poachers.

Our Reserve Manager and rangers will increase patrols to ensure we keep poachers out. Please report any persons that appear suspect.

General

You would have noticed the changes taking place on the property North of Grietjie, now called the Maseke Game Reserve. The newly formed Maseke now incorporates the old farms Archie, Square and Try (from Mica to the Grietjie turnoff. We have had the opportunity to meet with the lessee of this property i.e. Mr Nielsen and wish him all the best with his ideas and initiatives for the newly formed Game Reserve.

RESERVE MANAGER'S REPORT by Gerrie van Zyl

SECURITY AND ACCESS CONTROL/FENCE:

- There was an incident where a burglary in progress was reported. On further investigation we found it was actually the authorised contractor working. I urge landowners to let me know when contractors or visitors are visiting their property when they are not there. It will save us a lot of time and trouble. Thank you to the owner reporting this for being so vigilant and reporting this to me.
- One Sunday morning we received reports of a gunshot that was heard. On investigation and 2 hours later we find that it was an owner using a cracker to chase away baboons. If for some reason you have to make a noise that sounds like a gunshot, please SMS or WhatsApp me beforehand. It takes a lot of time following up on these incidents.

GAME MANAGEMENT:

- A poacher was caught and arrested who had snared an impala.
- One old snare with Waterbuck remains was found and destroyed.
- It was reported that an impala was seen with a snare around his neck. This animal could not be located yet.
- There are a lot of kudu & wildebeest calves, warthog babies and a report of a new born giraffe.
- A rhino was also killed by poachers in Balule just South of the river recently.

VEGETATION :

- Very dry with no grass.
- 63 trees removed on roads and fence for February.

CLIMATE / RAINFALL:

- First 3 weeks of February was very dry, hot and humid. The last week was overcast with some drizzle. I measured 10mm up to 27 February.

ROADS:

- Roads names are displayed on the new concrete block but our elephants are pushing the concrete blocks over. Continuous effort to replace or move it back in position.
- Zebra lane has been graded. Thanks Hans.
- New speed bumps on the main entrance road. Signage indicating these will be erected soon.

OTHER MATTERS:

- During a patrol I went into an outbuilding on a plot to see if there were no illegal visitors. When I entered, a warthog sleeping in there came charging out of the room and I was in his way. He bumped me and gave me a nasty cut on my upper leg and a cracked rib. Please be careful before you enter any empty building, galleys or any place where they can hide.
- There is an elephant (possible more than one) that a few people have reported to be very aggressive. He can be identified by his left tusk being curly and a broken right tusk. He is in must, so please be careful.

SIGHTINGS:

- Wild dogs are visiting Grietjie on occasion.
- Ground hornbill reported on the 26 & 27 February.
- Elephants very active with a few breeding herds around.

Pel's Fishing Owl

Scotopelia peli



The Pel's Fishing Owl is also known as the African Fish (or Fishing) Owl. It has the widest distribution of all the African fishing owls, and is the largest in this class. Although there can be quite a noticeable variation in their colouring, Pel's Fishing Owls are generally characterised by their reddish-brown colouring. They have large, dark eyes on a somewhat rounded head, with no ear tufts. It has a short tail. The upper part of the bird is dark with even darker markings, while the underside is pale with muted markings.

Because it preys on fish, the Pel's Fishing Owl has a number of adaptations that allow it to be as successful as possible. For example, the legs and toes are left unfeathered so that they do not retain excess water when constantly being dipped into the water to seize prey. The lack of ear tufts is an adaptation that has to do with the owl's not needing the sharp sense of hearing that other owls, which need to hear their prey, possess. Because the fish cannot hear the owl approaching, the bird's feathers do not need to be smoothly finished to reduce sound in flight, as they are in owls who hunt rodents and birds, for example.

Pel's Fishing Owl occupies forests and woods that are close to an abundant water source, such as a dam, lake or river, in which it can find its food. Less commonly, it can be found in semi-arid regions, as long as there are large, established trees situated close to water. The Pel's Fishing Owl is, as its name implies, a fish-eating bird. It can catch fish that weigh up to two kilograms in its powerful talons, although this is unusual. However, its diet will also extend to other prey, if and when necessary. This includes frogs, crabs, mussels, insects and juvenile crocodiles.

The Pel's Fishing Owl usually hunts at night. It perches in the tree, looking onto the water and waiting for fish to approach the surface. As they do, the bird will swoop down and snatch the fish from the water. Occasionally, it will also wade into the shallow water in search of prey. It is not a particularly social bird in any other sense.