



NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2016



Submitted by: Marius Porteus, 19 March 2016

“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

March was a quiet month with no new projects taken on. The current projects that are getting priority is the fence maintenance that is progressing and obtaining quotations for the Darisandi tar road reseal test project. Subject to funds and time we will also start with the entrance gate revamp.

The circa 50 mm rain in March brought some relief and we are thankful for this. Even the Olifants River flowed strongly after the good rains in the Highveld of Gauteng and Mpumalanga.

Finances

The financial position has improved after the donations and money for the last off takes were received.

This will allow us to move faster on fence and tar road repairs in the next few months.

Access control and Security

No incidents of crime were reported in March. Our staff at the gate are busy verifying and obtaining information of all staff employed on Grietjie. This information is required for safety and security purposes. Please assist in this regards.

Grietjie Staff

All our positions are filled and we are operating with full complement. As reported previously Mike Clulow is busy with the process to register the Grietjie Security activities as an in house security provider, as required.

Roads

I have driven all the internal gravel roads after the rain and it is not in a bad state at all. We have received assistance from Olifants North and some owners continue to assist with grading of roads. Pierre Ackemann also liaised with the Department of Roads to inform them about the speed humps on the main entrance road. We continue to receive positive feedback with regards to the speed humps. It has also now been clearly marked with the chevrons.

The committee has now received quotations and cost estimates to reseal a portion of the Darisandi Road. It is likely that we will outsource this to a competent service provider to ensure we do this properly since this could form the basis for medium term repair and maintenance of our degrading tar road system. Final approval should be given at the Committee meeting of 9 April 2016.

We have received complaints from a few owners that the potholes in the tar roads are filled with soil. Yes this is true. We have run out of tar repair mix and this is on order. Thanks Gerrie for the initiative taken to fill these potholes after the rain and before the Easter long weekend as a temporary measure. Gerrie will start with the proper repair of potholes as soon as we have received the product.

Fences and Infrastructure

The maintenance to the fence is continuing as planned.

Game and Vegetation

Veld conditions have improved slightly after the March rain. Animals still look ok.

Easter visitors were treated with numerous sightings of lion. A dead kudu carcass was found but later revealed that death was most likely caused by fighting after a penetration wound was found.

During patrols snares were found on a plot and adjacent property. This was likely placed by a worker on the property. The owners were informed and so were the police. The individual has not returned and is blacklisted from working on Grietie again.

General

Both the Grietjie and Balule Committee Meetings will take place in April i.e. 9 and 10 April.

A key discussion at the Grietjie meeting will be the issue of pedestrians. The committee will consider proposal to no longer allow pedestrians/staff walking to and from the main gate. The main reason for this is the safety of staff. This is a big five area and we as members should ensure our staff are looked after and protected from wild animals. We will communicate the outcome of this discussion and decisions in a special letter to members.

RESERVE MANAGER'S REPORT by Gerrie van Zyl

SECURITY AND ACCESS CONTROL/FENCE:

- No thefts reported.
- 4 Poachers /cable thieves arrested on Doreen and Maseke.
- 2 impala caught in snares, I opened a case of poaching and we found snares around the house. Thanks to the Mambas for their assistance.

GAME MANAGEMENT:

- Off-takes for 2015 quota was done successfully as per APNR/Balule protocol.
- Damage from Elephants are less than other months.
- Some female Impala`s show signs of the drought but the rest of the other animals are still in good condition.
- Found one dead Kudu bull with a hole in his stomach because of fighting.
- Found 2 leopard kills (Impala`s) on Darisandi road.
- Found 2 Lion kills (Giraffe).

VEGETATION:

- Red bush willow starting to turn yellow and dropping leaves.
- All other trees still green with new leaves on Mopani`s due to the rain.
- Grass shoots have come out. Let`s pray for follow-up rains.
- There is a lot of stress on the trees because most animals eat leaves to survive. Signs of Tannin are present.

CLIMATE / RAINFALL:

- Climate more bearable with the odd hot and humid days.
- An average of 50mm rain has fallen so far in March.

ROADS:

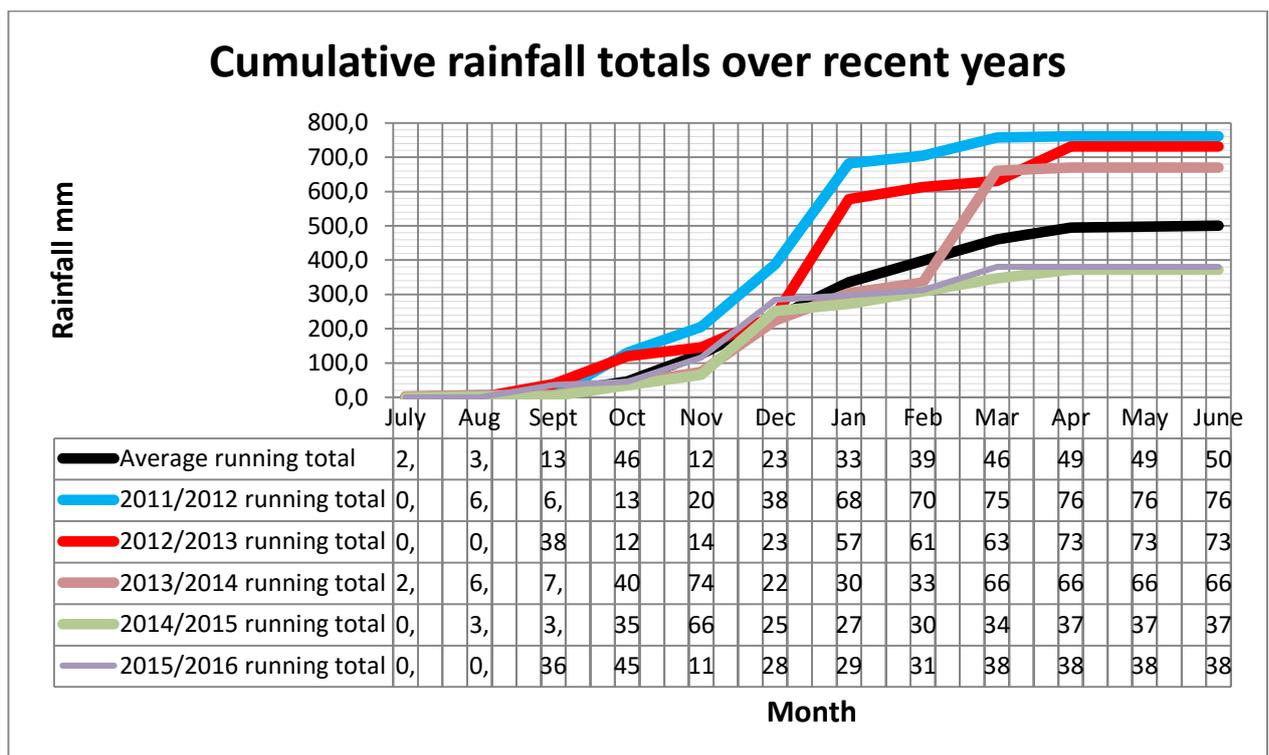
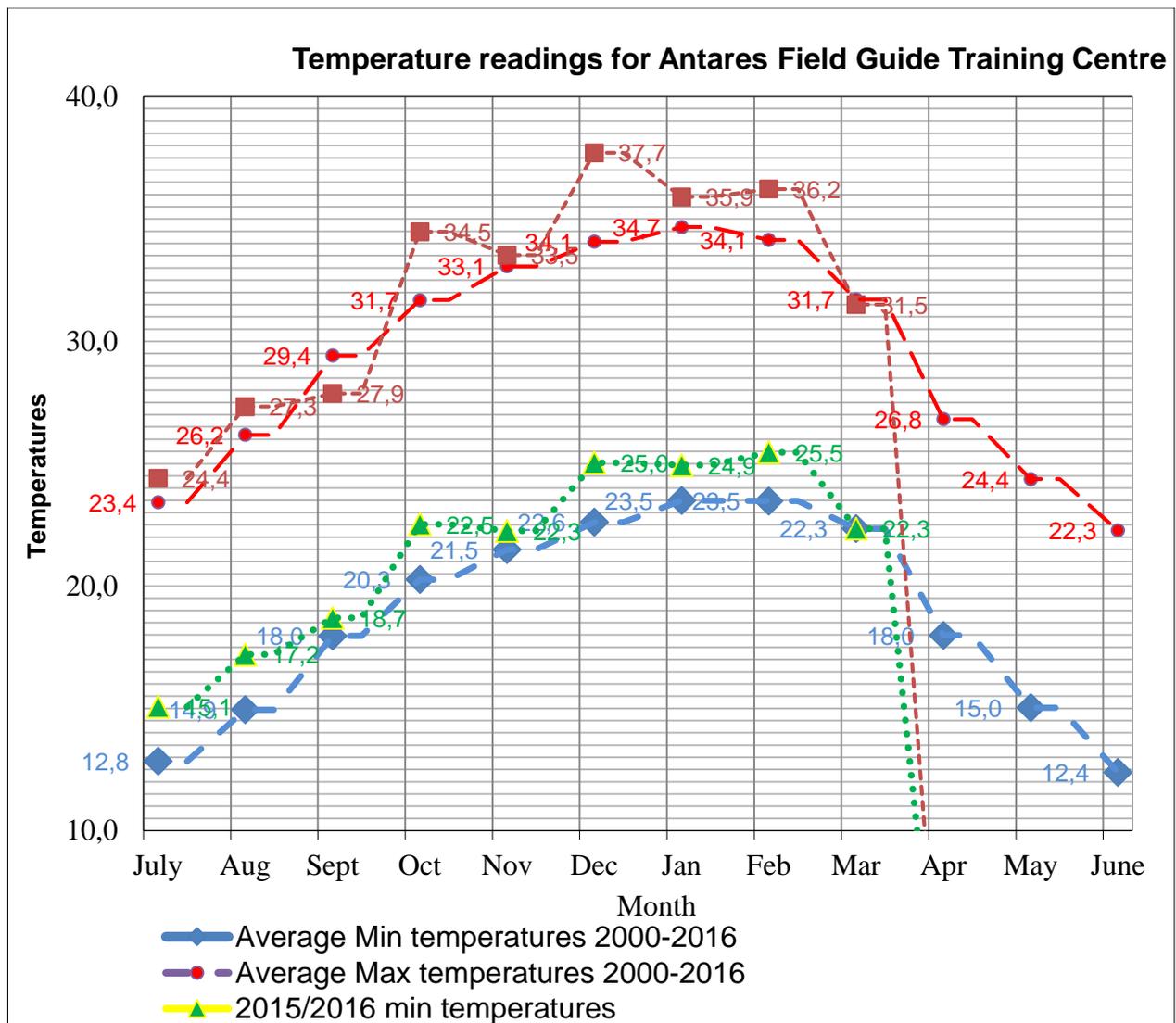
- Thanks to Hans Schmid for graded Scorpion road.
- Pot holes in the tar roads will be fixed as soon as the repair product has been received.

OTHER MATTERS:

- We appeal to game vehicle drivers to consider other road users. Please stop on the side of the road when they spot animals to enable others to pass.

DID YOU KNOW

Porcupines eat almost any sort of vegetation, moving up to 16 km from their burrows along established pathways to reach favoured feeding sites. And no, they cannot shoot their quills!





Cherelle Chrystal submitted the photo above to the committee asking if there was any significance to the tag on the bird. After consulting with Ian Owtram, his response was as follows: “The photo shows a white backed vulture that has been patagially tagged (in other words a coloured tag on the wing). This is an EWT Birds of Prey/Vulture monitoring programme and any records of these birds should be sent through to Andre Botha as detailed below.”

Patagial Tagging on Vultures in Southern Africa

Bird ringing has been used in southern Africa for almost 60 years as a cost-effective method to study many aspects of the biology of a wide range of species, including raptors. The first birds to be ringed in South Africa were a group of 31 Cape Vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*) nestlings at the Kranzberg colony in Limpopo in 1948.

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The following aspects with regard to the biology of raptors can be obtained by the use of ringing and colour-marking:

- Local movements and dispersal patterns
- Migratory patterns and seasonality
- Survival rates and longevity
- Causes of mortalities and potential threats

What is Patagial Tagging?

Colour-marking a bird enables researchers to individually identify birds in the field after release. The colour-marking method that is currently in use for vultures is known as “patagial tagging”. Patagial tagging refers to the fitting of a plastic tag to the “patagium”, or frontal flap of skin to the wing of a bird and has been used worldwide with great success on a wide range of bird species, including vultures and condors in Europe and America.

What to do when you see a tagged vulture? The EWT-BoPWG will also rely on members of the public, landowners and reserve managers to report any of these birds that are re-sighted. Now is the time for you to get involved and enhance your next visit to an area, such as a nature reserve or vulture restaurant, where vultures occur! Because vultures regularly visit well-managed restaurants, these sites will play a vital role in contributing to our knowledge of bird movements by people reporting on birds re-sighted there.

Should a tagged bird be seen, the observer should record the following details:

- Date
- time,
- locality
- GPS coordinates (if possible)
- Species
- Habitat
- condition of the bird

Most importantly, the colour of the tag and its specific alpha-numeric code must be recorded as this will provide us with an exact idea of the area where the bird was tagged. Ideally, observers should also attempt to photograph the tagged bird and submit a low-resolution image (les than 100Kb) with their report. It is also important that the observer provide their name and contact details should we require further information.

Who should re-sightings and recoveries be reported to?

All relevant information can be reported to the South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING) in Cape Town at telephone number +27 (0)21 650-2421/2 or safring@adu.uct.ac.za .

Alternatively, you can also contact the Birds of Prey Working Group directly at +27 (0)11 646-4629 or andreb@ewt.org.za The Birds of Prey Working Group is also in the process of setting up a reporting facility via its website on www.ewt.org.za .

Why do Scorpions glow?

Have you ever shone a UV light on a scorpion? If you do it will glow a bright blue/ green, but why?

Biologist, Douglas Gaffin, of the University of Oklahoma, found that scorpions may be able to sense light using their tails. This may be a reason why they glow.

The scorpions' exoskeleton collects light information and sends it to its nervous system.



The adult scorpions build up a chemical called Beta-Carboline, which glows under UV light. Interestingly baby scorpions do not glow because they have not built up enough of the chemical Beta-Carboline in their bodies yet which I discovered when I found mother and babies in my classroom.

By Cary Owtram

ANIMAL FACTS

Following the Reserve Managers narrow escape recently, I thought it relevant to publish an article about the.....

Warthog

Phacochoerus africanus



Warthogs are members of the same family as domestic pigs, but present a much different appearance. These sturdy hogs are not among the world's most aesthetically pleasing animals—their large, flat heads are covered with "warts," which are actually protective bumps. Warthogs also sport four sharp tusks. They are mostly bald, but they do have some sparse hair and a thicker mane on their backs.

Though warthogs appear ferocious, they are basically grazers. They eat grasses and plants, and also use their snouts to dig or "root" for roots or bulbs. When startled or threatened, warthogs can be surprisingly fast, running at speeds of up to 30 miles (48 km) an hour.

Warthogs are adaptable and are able to go long periods without water, as much as several months in the dry season.

When water is available, warthogs will seek it and often submerge to cool down. They will also wallow in mud for the same purpose—and to gain relief from insects. Birds also aid these hogs

in their battle with insects; ox-peckers and other species sometimes ride along on their warthog hosts, feeding on the tiny creatures invading their hides.

These African hogs often utilize empty dens created by aardvarks. Rather than fight, they often choose flight, and search for such a den to use as a hidey-hole. They typically back in, using their tusks to effectively guard the entrance.

Warthogs also use these dens to have their young. Females have litters of four or fewer young, which they suckle for about four months.

Source: National Geographic