



NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2016



Picture courtesy of: Aruna Mohan

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT by Mike Joseph

UNDER THE LEADWOOD:

I trust everybody had a blessed Christmas and an excellent new year and I wish everyone well for 2017.

On a much improved note, the reserve is looking just fantastic and it's really hard to imagine that just a short 5 to 6 weeks ago the reserve looked almost like a demolition zone.

Informal feedback on the Declaration process was given at Tulani 28th December. As this is an informal feedback process, I will be repeating this in the future for those who were not able to attend (and for those who might wish to hear it again or ask some questions). Date will be advised at a later stage.

In summary, certain reserves within Balule have already attained Nature Reserve (PA) status and 3 more regions are about to submit applications in the very near future. It has been decided on a phased approach. Those regions that have already been declared and those whose applications are pending or imminent, will change the names of the applications as an alteration (once declaration is complete) to BALULE NATURE RESERVE. This means all our regions will, when declared, be part of Balule Nature reserve. It was also decided to delay GNR (and Parsons although I cannot speak for them). This delay has some advantages for us. Firstly, both regions are too fragmented to be declared a PA in their own right due to various footprint criteria in the act. However, when absorbed as part of Balule, these criteria will be met. Secondly it gives us more time to increase our current 75% membership to hopefully a MUCH higher figure. The more people who are on board the better the unison of the application. Thirdly, hopefully the lands claim issue will have been settled by then. Whilst this COULD be overcome, it is certainly a complicating factor when application is made before the claim is settled.

A substantial amount of discussions have been undertaken concerning the inclusion (or not) of Maseke Game Reserve into Balule. To this end, the 3 regions north of the river (Grietjie, ONGR and Parsons are referred to as GOP) have met with Maseke and a proposal for tabling and discussion at the next Balule meeting end January. There are benefits to GOP, but there is still a way to go. It is also the intention of GOP and Maseke to meet on a more frequent basis to deal with issues of common interest (including the issue of Maseke joining Balule). There is too much to put on paper here, and when I do the informal feedback for the declaration I will give the latest updates on this issue at the same time. Date to be advised.

The VEK/ONGR fence has been removed. Discussions with the chairman of Olifants North in this regard have been most satisfactory.

I would just like to repeat something from last month. We are at the time of the year when the appearance of 2 noxious invaders is made especially on the river plots. Cocklebur (*Xanthium sp*) and Moonflower (*Datura cf: innoxia*). Fortunately they are easily removed and we make an appeal to all river plot owners to remove these plants from their plots near the river banks.

The CAPs (Commercial Authorisation Permit) holders, (those lodges who have signed the constitution and who pay their levies and CAP fees) met recently and they have agreed together that with effect January 2017, each lodge will charge their guests a R10 per night conservation fee. The first portion of this fee will go to offset their CAP levies, the balance will be donated to the reserve on condition that the money be used on a project(s) to be decided by the CAP holders. It is estimated that this will raise somewhere between R50000 and R80000 for the reserve. This is done voluntarily by the CAPs and it is agreed that we trust the integrity of each CAP to report honestly.

Until next time from

Under the Leadwood.

RESERVE MANAGER'S REPORT by Gerrie van Zyl

SECURITY AND ACCESS CONTROL / FENCE

- Fences repairs on Doreen/Maseke fence on going.

GAME MANAGEMENT:

- Animals in good condition.
- Elephant damage still high.
- Lions sightings almost every day.
- Buffaloes are regular visitors.

VEGETATION:

- All trees green and lush.
- New grass shoots in places.

CLIMATE / RAINFALL:

- Weather pleasant with a few very hot (40+) days.
- 79 mm for December 2016 measured at the gate.

ROADS:

- Lots of storm damage on gravel roads.
- Repairs to Zebra Ln.- thanks Hans.
- Repaired Maggie`s hill.

OTHER MATTERS:

- Install more road signs on concrete road blocks.

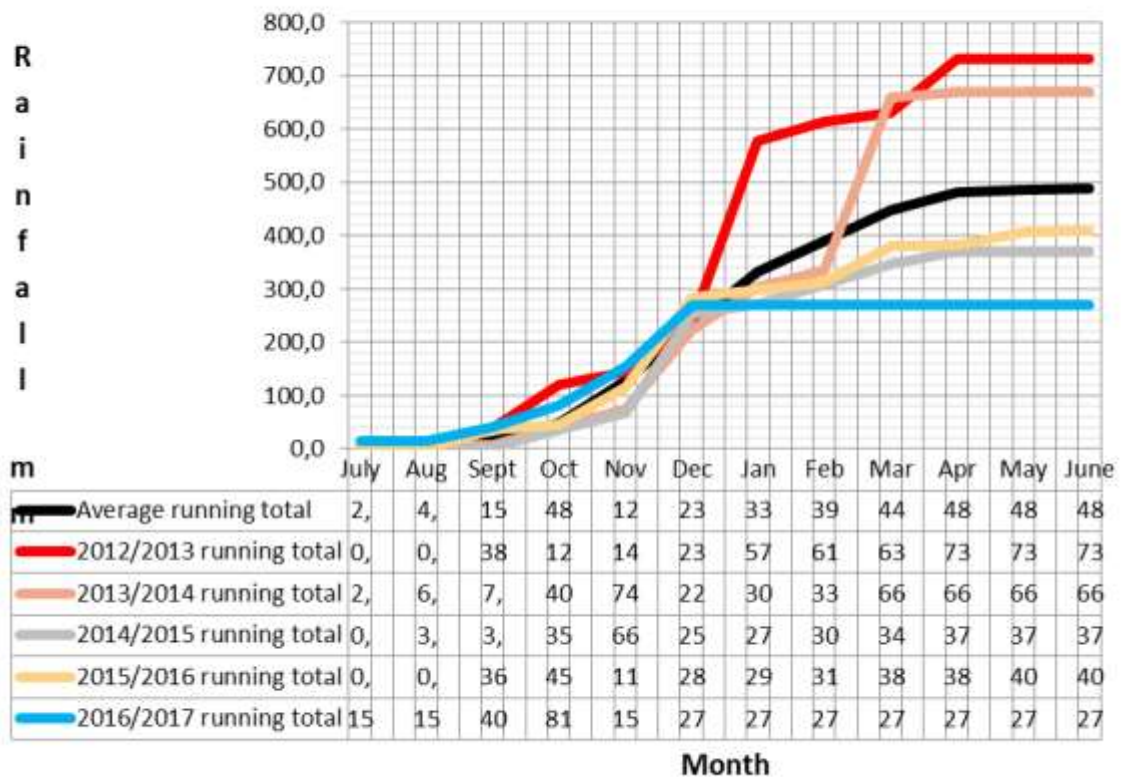
AROUND THE CAMPFIRE

On the 27th December while I was doing my morning walk before work to check my cameras, I could hear the soft oomph of lion's busy hunting. It is very difficult to identify exactly where the sound comes from because it is so soft. After walking another couple hundred meters I heard the Impalas warning calls. As I stood there listening a Lioness came running towards me, I could see that she was not aware of me so I just stood still, at about 40 m from me she became aware of me, stopped and ducked down to look at me for a few seconds, gave a growl (sounds like a V8!) and ran the other way, went around a rocky outcrop, jumped on a rock and sat there watching me. The other Lions were probably lying in ambush on the other side of the Impalas. On my way back home I came across two Elephant bull's fighting, breaking trees and trumpeting. What a privilege to experience this on foot on our own little paradise. (I always carry a rifle with me on my walks. Please don't take chances).

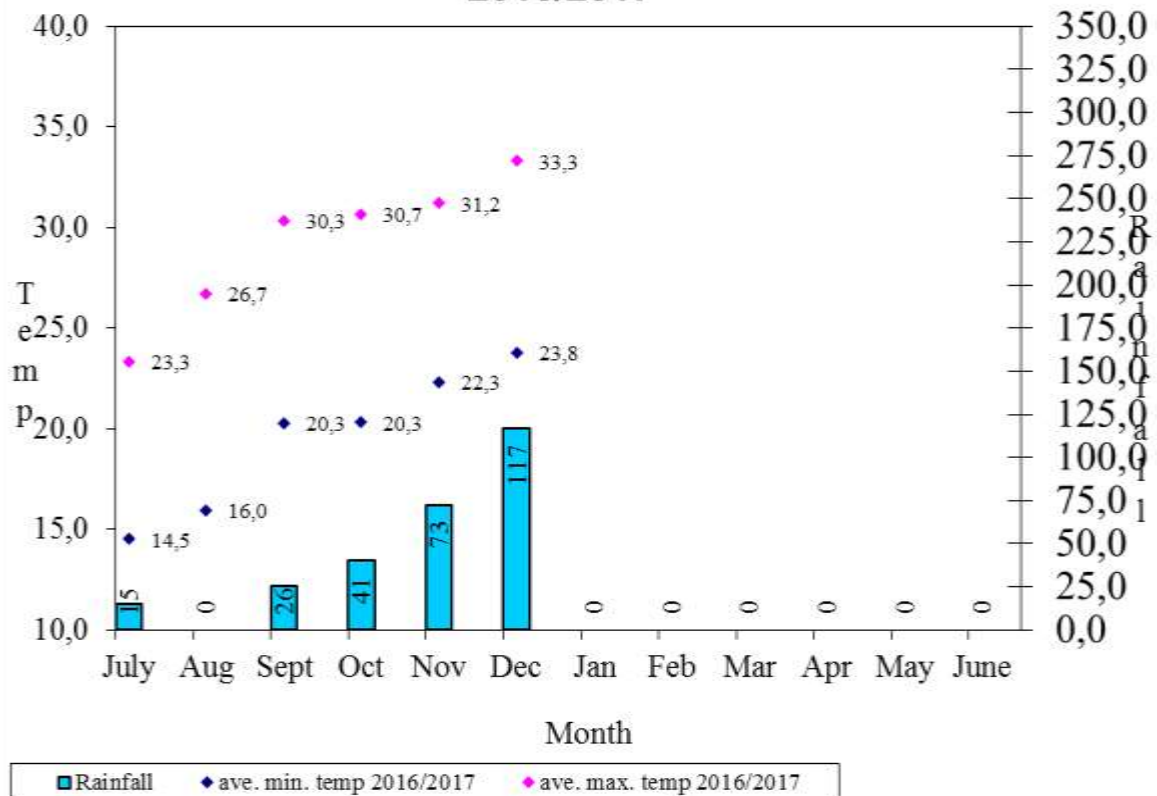
From me all the BLESSINGS for the New Year.

RAINFALL AND TEMPERATURE STATS by Ian Owtram

Cumulative rainfall totals over recent years



Rainfall and Temperature readings for Antares Field Guide Training Centre for the year 2016/2017



CO-EXISTING WITH NATURE IN A SUSTAINABLE AND BUSH-FRIENDLY MANNER

A GPNR forum on guidelines relating to the interaction between humans and the natural environment

This month we deal with another frequently asked question pertaining to living in the bush in a responsible manner.

GUIDELINE 3

IS IT ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE TO COLLECT FIRE WOOD FROM ONE'S OWN PROPERTY?

When we're at Grietjie, what can be nicer than sitting around the fire with friends and family? But, where do we find our wood? Some feel that collecting wood from their properties in moderation is acceptable, while others believe it should not be done at all. Much depends on the circumstances. There is, for example, a big difference between a busy lodge that constantly gathers wood for its guests and an owner who gathers a little now and again. Availability might also play a role, such as the fact that under present conditions we seem to have a great deal of dead wood lying around.

Whatever one decides, be responsible, and do not rob nature of the important organic recycling that should be taking place.

Please leave enough wood to break down and rejuvenate the soils which so desperately need the extra nutrients, and enough wood to encourage seedbeds which allow grasses and new trees to establish themselves.

Also leave sufficient wood to provide food and homes for the many animals who rely on this resource, and be especially mindful not to disturb existing nests of spiders, insects and other animals.

The following are important points to remember:

- **Never** cut down living trees to make firewood. Take only moderate amounts from trees that have died due to natural circumstances.
- **Various tree species are protected** in terms of the **National Forests Act** of 1998. Protected trees may not be cut, disturbed, damaged, destroyed and their products may not be possessed, collected, removed, transported, exported, donated, purchased or sold – except under a license granted by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. Examples of protected trees include Apple leaf, Baobab, Bushveld saffron, Camel thorn, Leadwood, Marula and Pod Mahogany.
- Contravention in terms of the above legislation is regarded as a first category offence that may result in a person, who is found guilty, to be sentenced to a fine or imprisonment for a period up to three years, or to both a fine and imprisonment.
- No wood is allowed to leave Grietjie, unless a permit is issued by the committee.

- No person is allowed to collect wood from neighbouring properties unless specifically permitted by the owner to do so.
- Entering someone else's property to collect wood without permission contravenes section 1 of the **Trespass Act 6** of 1959. This is a criminal offence and a person found guilty could be liable to a fine, imprisonment, or both.

Lastly, it is vitally important that owners and residents educate and monitor their staff and visitors. Please advise them:

- To collect wood sparingly.
- Not to interfere with the wood of protected species.
- Not to interfere with trunks/branches containing nests of animals.
- **Never** to enter another owner's property to collect wood.

Compiled by Liz Lewis

We wish to thank Ian Owtram, Hans Schmid and Mike Joseph of the Environmental Interest Group, and Joel Lewis of the Department of Biological Sciences, UCT, for their respective input and suggestions.

ANIMAL FACTS

Millipede (Songololo)

Diplopoda



Millipedes are Myriapods, which means they have long segmented bodies, short heads and many pairs of legs, their numerous legs being their most obvious feature. The name Millipede derives from Latin roots, 'milli' meaning 'thousand' and 'ped' meaning foot. However, despite their name, these creatures do not have thousands of legs.

Some rare species can have 750 legs, however, common species have between 80 and 400 legs. Millipedes have two pairs of legs attached to each segment of its body, except the very first segment behind the head and the next few segments which only have one pair of legs each. Each segment that has two pairs of legs is a result of two single segments being fused together as one. When Millipedes walk, each pair of legs is lifted at the same time, moving along in a wave motion.

Millipede eyes consist of a number of simple flat lens ocelli arranged in a group on the front/side of the head. Millipedes have very poor eyesight which is sometimes nonexistent. They sense their way around by using their antennae which continually taps the ground as the millipede moves along. The head contains a pair of sensory organs found just behind their antennae and are oval shaped. They are probably used to measure the humidity in the surroundings.

Millipedes are very clean creatures and spend a lot of time cleaning and polishing various parts of their body. They have a special brush-like group of hairs on the 2nd or 3rd pair of their legs which they use to clean their antennae.

Most millipedes have very elongated cylinder shaped bodies, although some are flattened dorsoventrally (extending from the back to the belly), while Pill Millipedes are short and can roll into a ball. The giant African millipede (*Archispirostreptus gigas*) is one of the largest of the millipedes, growing up to 11 inches (28 centimetres) in length. It lives in tropical and subtropical Africa, in rotting plant life or moist earth and usually avoids light. It is black in colour and is often kept as a pet.

Millipedes are detritivores (animals that consume decomposing organic material and in doing so contribute to decomposition and the recycling of nutrients). Most millipedes eat decaying leaves and other dead plant matter, moisturising the food with secretions and then scraping it in with the jaws.

A few species are known to feed on animal remains or funguses. Many species will also eat their own waste pellets. It is believed that they obtain nutrition from funguses growing inside the pellets rather than from the waste itself.

Having very many short legs makes millipedes rather slow, but they are powerful burrowers. With their legs and body length moving in a wavelike pattern, they easily force their way underground head first. They are able to reinforce their tunnels by rearranging the particles around it.

Millipedes have a hard exoskeleton helps to protect them against predators. When threatened, they coil up into a ball to protect the more vulnerable underside. Many species also emit poisonous liquid secretions through microscopic pores along the sides of their bodies as a secondary defence. Some of these substances are caustic (substance that causes corrosion) and can burn the exoskeleton of ants and other insect predators. As far as humans are concerned, this liquid is fairly harmless, usually causing only minor effects on the skin, the main effect being discolouration but other effects may also include pain and itching.

Most millipedes lack a waxy layer on the outside of their exoskeletons, or hard outer coverings, that helps to prevent the loss of body moisture. Like centipedes, millipedes spend most of their time in cool wet places and become active only at night or after it has been raining.

Males and females usually have to mate to produce offspring, with males usually depositing sperm directly into the reproductive organs of the female. There may or may not be any courtship behaviour. Bristly millipede males must first spin a web on which they deposit their sperm. The female then approaches the web and puts the sperm into her own reproductive organs. In some pill millipedes a male attracts a female to mate with squeaking noises made by rubbing the bases of his legs against his body. He then grasps the female's body with his legs. A sperm packet is released behind his head and passed back from one pair of legs to the next, until it reaches the reproductive organs of the female. In other pill millipedes the male covers the sperm packet in dirt before passing it back with his legs to his mate's reproductive organs.

Millipedes lay their eggs in the soil. Some species make individual cases for their eggs out of chewed-up leaves. In some species, the female, and occasionally the male, guard the eggs until they hatch. Although young millipedes resemble small adults, they usually have no legs when they first hatch from the egg.

After they molt, or shed their exoskeleton for the first time, they have six body segments and three pairs of legs. They add additional body segments and pairs of legs with each molt until they reach the maximum adult number. Millipedes molt in sheltered places underground or in cracks in the soil. This is a very delicate stage of their lives. Millipedes reach adulthood in one or two years, sometimes longer. Adults live for one to eleven years, although some individuals may live longer.

This class of arthropods is thought to be among the first animals to have colonised land during the Silurian geologic period (443 million years ago). These early forms probably ate mosses and primitive vascular plants. The oldest known land creature, *Pneumodesmus newmani*, was a 1 centimetre long millipede.

No millipedes are considered endangered or threatened.

Source: animalcorner.co.uk/animals/millipedes/

CLASSIFIEDS

Please submit any small classified adverts that you want published every month to grietjiecomms@gmail.com and we will gladly provide free publication thereof.

If you are interested in purchasing property within Grietjie please contact the committee as we have a good selection of properties for sale by their owners.



Shuttle transfers from Hoedspruit's Eastgate airport to your doorstep at Grietjie. From as little as R350, contact Hennie on 072 640 8033

Greyhound now provide a daily return bus service between Phalaborwa via Nelspruit to Johannesburg.

Contact www.citiliner.co.za or Krish on 071 000 7727



FOR SALE

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FOR SALE

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