



Olifants North Game Reserve

DECEMBER 2009

After the magnificent rainfall we received in November, December certainly has its work cut out to try and keep the good news of rain coming! We had a very much needed break for 10 days at the beginning of the month, with Sandy and Eric once again kindly stepping in to hold the reins, which we'd like to take this opportunity of thanking most sincerely. However the weather was really against us whilst we were at the coast – 1½ days of sun in 10 days!! Arriving back on the 13th in 38°C it really felt like we were back home – nothing had changed with the heat – then 'blow us down' a magnificent storm erupted that evening and 63mm of glorious rain fell. Our month to date rainfall is 104.25mm and season to date to 319.75mm. What another exceptional month it's been. Temperatures continued to rise in the days preceding Christmas – ranging from 40°-42°C, and I wondered how on earth I'd prepare our traditional meal in these temperatures, but then remembered how fortunate we are to now have air-conditioning – the first time ever in all the years that we've lived in the bush!!

As a result of the incredible rainfall, we've noticed 100% germination of the dreaded Black Jack's that have spread their seeds from the last season far and wide, creating what looks like a stunning green carpet mainly underneath the shade canopies of the trees.

The bush is incredibly thick as I write this and game viewing has become an exceptional test for locating any animals – they are in all probability still very much around but because of the thickness of vegetation it's become far more difficult to 'spot' them. Peter (B1) reported seeing a few wildebeeste calves in our small herd up towards Rhino plains, which is really good news and with the scarcity of lion, hopefully this little herd will flourish.



We decided we'd also put up a 'bush' Christmas tree in the office this year, just as we've done wherever we've lived in the bush before. We adorned it with silver and gold spray-painted giant land snail shells and red baubles, all tied to the branches with red ribbons. What a pretty picture it made!

We hope you all had a very happy Christmas with your families.

RECORDED SIGHTINGS

09/12/09	09h30	A8	Pair of Pels Fishing owls – North floodplain
10/12/09	18h30	B38	African Wildcat – Jackalberry road near B32
11/12/09	18h00	B38	2 x Black rhino at Big Dam
16/12/09	20h00	B1	2 x hyena at bridge crossed N – S then back S – N 2 x hippo at bridge
25/12/09	18h00	B19	3 x elephant at northern side of causeway
26/12/09	17h00	B7	Leopard and cub at the bottom of old airstrip
30/12/09	18h00	B36	Elephant at Speakers corner
	17h30	B1	2 elephant in river bed below unit right at the deck
	22h00	B1	1 elephant almost in the boma
31/12/09	07h00	B24	Female leopard and cub in a tree along river drive near causeway
	17h00	B1	Hippo grazing on flood plain
	17h0	B14 B35	Black mamba eating bats – going in and out of hole in a tree on the left of causeway loop

Yes, elephant are being recorded in the sightings book, having almost become rare if you can believe it! With the superb rain we've had we can only surmise that the pressure is off these huge animals and they've moved elsewhere, giving our trees and vegetation a rest at long last.

With this being the season of new beginnings, I thought that the following photographs sent in by Veronica Hurly (B14) would give some of you, who haven't been down since the rains fell, an idea of what you're missing. You really need to get to Olifants soon!!





Staff news

The Christmas party for the staff was held on the evening of the 23rd with our family kindly being invited to join in their festivities, and off we set at about 19h00 after being radioed by Makgoba to tell us the food was ready. Arriving at the village we could hear that the party was already in full swing so decided we'd add to it. Asking the children to wait at the vehicle I went to call the staff, who were all dressed in their best, and on cue, as everyone came to see why I was calling them, the music of our Mandoza c.d. was put on as loudly as possible. All the staff joined in, some doing the 'gumboot' dance (including Joe!) and others, with their incredible rhythm, showing us just how to do it the African way! Afterwards we all headed off to enjoy the meal which had been prepared, our children especially relishing the sadza "pap" and sauce. What a happy evening it turned out to be.

Sadly Rose, one of our housekeeping assistants, who has been at Olifants North since August 2004, will be leaving us at the end of the month. Due to family commitments she has decided that it is in the best interests of her family to leave our employment. However, good news is that she is willing to step in to help us out whenever necessary.

Abigail Mthabeni will be joining us on our permanent staff – having been employed temporarily for a number of years at the reserve, she's no newcomer and hopefully will enjoy being at Olifants North on a permanent basis. Welcome Abigail.

THE POWER OF NATURE

A massive storm began brewing on the afternoon of the 29th with humidity reaching unbearable levels – was it going to rain or not? Little did we know what was about to unfold later that afternoon as we watched the storm clouds gathering to the East then moving South, then doubling back over the top of Olifants North heading North leaving us with clear skies overhead. Flashes of lightning could be seen all around but no rain fell – a catastrophic event unfurled right under our noses, one that we had absolutely no idea would occur! Unit 19 was struck by a bolt of lightning that a shareholder on Olifants River alerted their office to, and with many shareholders on Olifants River and some of our shareholders witnessed firsthand. Within seconds smoke was billowing and the massive flames leapt into the air. With Joe rushing around to try and locate where the flames were coming from, having first been advised that they were behind the office, then finding it all clear at the camp whilst tailing it up Camp road to the ridges saw the smoke after the climb to the second ridge. Being the first to arrive at Nicci and Lars Cox’s home, despite the intense heat from the fire that had already taken over, and choking smoke, managed to smash the driver’s side window of Lars’ brothers vehicle and push it out of the way. Rushing back to the garage in an attempt to move Nicci’s vehicle he was met by the awful sound of gas bottles about to explode – he just knew he couldn’t move the vehicle before everything would detonate and it would prove to be too dangerous! By now we had rallied our staff together (having only half a work force as the





others were on their day's off) with fire fighting equipment. Thankfully Mario, Glenn and their staff were also on their way with fire fighting equipment loaded on the back of their landcruiser, as well as their tractor and water trailer. The wind from the storm was by now fuelling the fire as it rushed up the ridges sending flames and chunks of thatch into the air and, with feelings of utter desperation, all we could do was try and contain the fire, whilst watching

out for falling embers in the surrounding bush.

Reflecting back on this awful night, all we can say is a huge thank you to all the Olifants River members, Mario, Glenn, Meagan, Karin, Olifants River staff and our members and staff who all rallied together and offered assistance in so many ways.

NYONI BEADING PROJECT

The draw for the six embroidered and beaded birds took place at the New Year's eve bash which was held in the lapa at the clubhouse on 31 December. The lucky winners drawn from the kitty by John Fletcher (B35) were:

Kathy Buley – unit B32
Rene Vromans – unit A4
Wally Fish – unit B33
David Schaad – unit 37
Carey McKenzie – unit B32
Mandy Proudfoot – unit B1



Here's a photo of Mandy, taken at the New Year's eve bash, admiring her prize:

Thank you to each and everyone who kindly purchased tickets for these exquisite birds – R3000.00 was raised in the sale of tickets which will be divided between the five ladies that were involved.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

What a wonderful evening the 31st turned out to be in spite of it being really hot in the afternoon – we had a wonderful turnout of people for the ‘bring and braai’ despite the late notice, and it wouldn’t have been possible to be well prepared without the help of our members – Kelly and Bill (unit B12) blew up 30 black and white balloons and with much hysteria brought them down to the camp in the afternoon, many of them popping along the way sounding like rifle shots! Eileen (unit B35) was our chief salad maker, whipping up the salads in no time at all. Thank you to everyone else who offered help.

Here are some of the photo’s taken at the New Year’s eve bash:





As we end off 2009, may we take this opportunity to wish you all a very

Happy New Year