

# NEWSLETTER DECEMBER

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Dear clients,

The end of 2019 is in sight! In this newsletter more info on the difficulties for animals during the first rains and the toxic plant 'Slangkop', which is enjoying our drought and flowers in many parts of Namibia at the moment. There is also an overview of our year, we hope you enjoy the photos. We wish you a merry Christmas, and a wonderful and wet 2020!

All the best! Kind regards, Ulf and Mariska

## MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Dear clients,

2019 has been a difficult year for all Namibians, especially the farmers. But now 2020 is about to start, and we are sure it will be an amazing year! We want to thank you for your support throughout the year and look forward to be of assistance to you in 2020!

Take care, have a wonderful Christmas and make 2020 a fantastic year!

Best regards,

Ulf & Mariska



A VERY MERRY  
**CHRISTMAS**  
and Happy New Year!



*We wish you and your loved ones a wonderful Christmas and an amazing 2020, sparkled with love and laughter, and lots of rain!  
Enjoy the holidays!*

*Ulf and Mariska*





## THE FIRST RAINS, A BLESSING OR...?

Following the long awaited first rains, everybody was ecstatic but soon many farmers reported high and unexpected animal losses, even where animals have been fed. Why these “unexpected” losses? There are a couple of contributing factors that would predispose animals (esp. game) to mortality when exposed to severe cold stress:

Firstly, due to the drought most animals are very thin and have minimal fat reserves. These fat reserves are essential to provide the body energy to stay warm in cold weather, and act as an insulant against cold (less important in wild animals). Shivering to generate heat burns a lot of energy and consumes critically low body reserves.

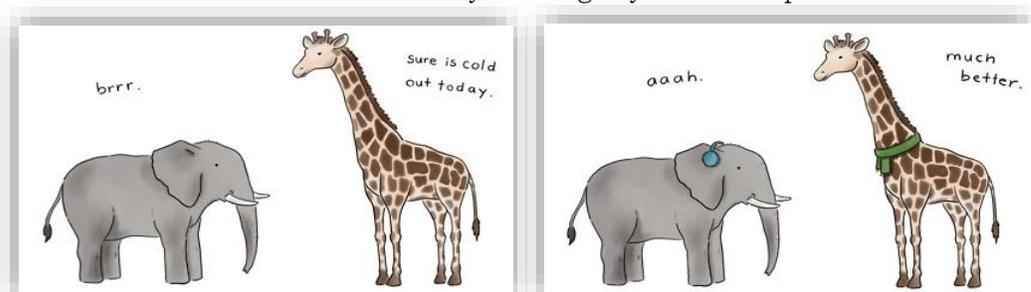
Secondly, as soon as the rains start, you will notice fewer animals (esp. game) come to the feeding areas. They roam around looking for fresh grass/browse, which is however not yet available since “it does not rain grass”. The animals thus expend even more of their limited energy reserves (walking, searching etc.), without having the benefit of sufficient food intake.

Thirdly: We all know from personal experience that wind and wet severely aggravates our perception of cold – this is the so called wind chill factor. Under optimal conditions animals will go into densely bushed areas to try find shelter from the wind. Following our devastating drought, the bush and trees are late to be covered in leaves, thus only presenting minimal shelter from the wind. On farms where extensive and injudicious debushing was done (or quite likely also to radical bush trimming of lower branches for Boskos production) this protective effect was further diminished.

What could be done to minimise or prevent these losses? Considering the above predisposing causes a few obvious solutions come to mind:

- 1) Try to maintain animals in the best possible condition throughout the winter/drought – under current conditions this was impossible for most farmers.
- 2) If a weather forecast suggests a cold spell, consider providing the animals with an extra ration of hay, ideally supplemented with a high-energy food such as maize. The microbial fermentation of this food in the rumen or large intestine generates a lot of heat (WITHOUT consuming the animals energy) that may carry the animals through the crisis. In addition the extra ration will provide energy to help the animals “weather the storm”.
- 3) Provide shelter against bad weather. Remember, bush are food for browsers, and provide shelter for animals against rain and cold wind. We recommend farmers to consider doing structured debushing, leaving patches of dense bush (minimum of 0.5 - 1 ha in size) interspersed in the debushed areas (take in mind a cheetah skin for example, with open grass plains (the yellow part) interspersed with ½ - 1 ha sized patches of denser bush (the black spots).

Some farmers had great success in adapting newly imported Nyala, who are very sensitive to these cold spells, to our often harsh winters by erecting wind shelters with boma curtains. Another effective wind shelter can be constructed by stacking hay bales on top of each other close to high animal density areas.





## OSANANGA LILY – SLANGKOP

Recently we were called out to a game farm where the eland suffered from diarrhoea and a number died very acutely near the water. This type of history is often seen in acute poisoning involving heart toxins. We immobilized several eland and examined blood and faecal samples, but no major abnormalities showed under the microscope. All the eland had soiled hindquarters (a sign of diarrhoea) and were in poor condition.

This farm is hard hit by the drought and has minimal vegetation cover. We did, however, notice the Osananga lily (*Pseudogaltonia clavata*), also known as Cape Hyacinth, 'Slangkop' or 'Groenlelie' to be thriving on the farm.

This perennial plant is common in Namibia, and grows in poor sandy soil. It flowers from September to December, and flourishes in times of drought. Because they have huge underground bulbs, which act as a water reservoir, these plants are highly drought resistant and thus sprout early, even before the first rains come.

During our visit to the farm, these plants represented the only 'green' on the farm, and the eland were eating them. The flowers and young leaves are the most toxic, and eating it is known to cause diarrhoea, dehydration, hind quarter lameness, bloat and death due to heart failure in livestock.

Under normal grazing conditions, most animals will avoid eating the lily due to the awful taste, but under desperate drought conditions, animals are inclined to eat any fresh green plant material they can get. Some say that this plant has no effect on game, and that game in general is not susceptible to plant toxicities because "they instinctively know and avoid toxic plants". There are a few exceptions to this rule. Game introduced from a different area are usually naive to the poisonous plants in their new home range, and may thus eat them. The eland under discussion were imported from South-Africa and definitely showed signs highly suggestive of plant toxicity (diarrhoea, acute death near water).

Dosing affected animals with a large dose of activated charcoal (2 g/kg live weight) is effective where this absorbs and binds the plant toxins in the rumen while supposedly also resorbing toxins from the blood back into the intestine. It is essential to minimize stress and exertion by keeping animals calm and rested. In addition to administering a long acting tranquiliser, we gave all the eland a good dose of supportive vitamins, dewormed them, and gave some antibiotics.

Poisoning can be prevented by fencing off infested areas and/or eradication of plants by digging up the bulbs of the "slangkop". This should be done before the plant flowers and throws of thousands of seeds. Providing sufficient quantity and quality supplemental feeding near water points will reduce the temptation to eat the plants, while this also reduces the need of physical exertion which may precipitate acute heart failure.



The Osananga lily has a big bulb that can grow up to 17 cm in diameter.  
Photos © M. Bijsterbosch



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Seeds of the Osananga lily

# WHAT A YEAR... 2019



*January* started off with 2 unfortunate animals; a young hippo bull at Erindi was kicked out of the group, and found a better place in one of the swimming pools! We took him back to another (more natural...) water. Then we also had to assist a rhino with a "tyre change" gone wrong...



*February* Here we are vaccinating rhinos with Rhinovax. This vaccine is formulated for the prevention of a wide variety of clostridium infections and anthrax. It can be used in a wide variety of species such as white rhino, buffalo, nyala, sable, roan and lion.



*March* We went to an Angolan farm to do a health check on their wildlife and dairy farm animals. We also went to the DRC to do some health checks on the wildlife, and removed a tumour from a lion's nose. An important goal of Wildlife Vets Namibia is education and training, so this whole trip was a good practical exercise for the Congolese vets and rangers that we train up.



*April* Dystocia, also called obstructed labour, is rarely seen in wild animals. We do see this however occasionally in intensive game farming, where prime nutrition results in animals coming on heat earlier, or being mating earlier. Thus, using a big heavy bull on a small framed heifer may cause problems. In this case the sable calf was already dead, but the cow was unable to push the rest out. We immobilised the cow, and removed the calf.



**May** An exciting month... Our very first elephant translocation per ship! We took a family unit of elephants from Mount Etjo to Parc de la Vallée de la N'Sele in the DRC. From capture until the release, the entire trip took about 6 days. The elephants quickly learned to drink straight from the hose! We released them in a special pre-release boma, which was opened up a day later. Now they have about 20.000 ha full of green vegetation and lots of water to enjoy!



[Video: Elephant translocation](#)



**June** We darted several lions to give them a birth-control implant and to change radio-telemetry collars.

**July** We did a health check and trimmed hooves of some roan antelopes. One of them had a lump on her hip. It appeared to be a tape worm cyst! This particular tapeworm is the 'Echinococcus granulosus', which causes fluid-filled cysts in the body; we call this cystic echinococcosis.



**August** From small to big! We treated a small sable calf with a nasty abscess on its cheek, and moved a massive sable bull to another camp.



[Video: DRC Game translocation](#)

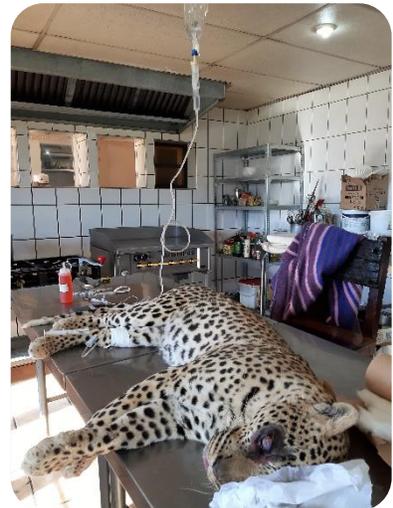
*September* Together with Herholdt Family Trust, we started to translocate game into the DRC in 2017. Since this project started, over 1200 heads of game have been translocated. In September this year we took additional herds of waterbuck, blue wildebeest, eland, nyala and giraffe to the reserve. In case of big reserves, and when the travel is long, we believe it's best to offload the animals in a pre-release boma. This way they don't have to walk far for food and water and can thus recover, and the herds quickly join up. After 1-3 days the boma is opened.



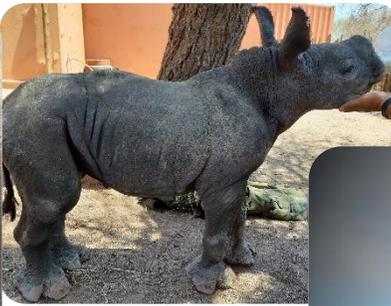
*We did a health check on this impressive rhino bull*



*We also dehorned rhinos in September, a sad, but necessary measure to discourage poachers...*



*October* A busy month with exciting jobs! We treated an elephant with an abscess and we vaccinated rhinos against anthrax. On invitation of CCF we gave training to a group of rangers from Niger, who we learned more about game capture, translocations, darting and doing a PM. We also had to remove a leopard's eye, as it was badly infected.



*This 1-week old rhino calf was found without her mother. As she was already so weak, we did not have a choice but to intervene. We rushed her to Mount Etjo, where Annette Oelofse and her team tirelessly take care of her.*



*She was named Tatuleki, meaning the frail one. Recently another bull calf lost his mom, and now the two are raised together. Raising a rhino is no joke (let alone 2!), it costs a lot of time, energy and costs. When they get older, each will drink up to 25L per day! If you want to support the calves, please have a look at Tatuleki's [GoFundMe page](#).*

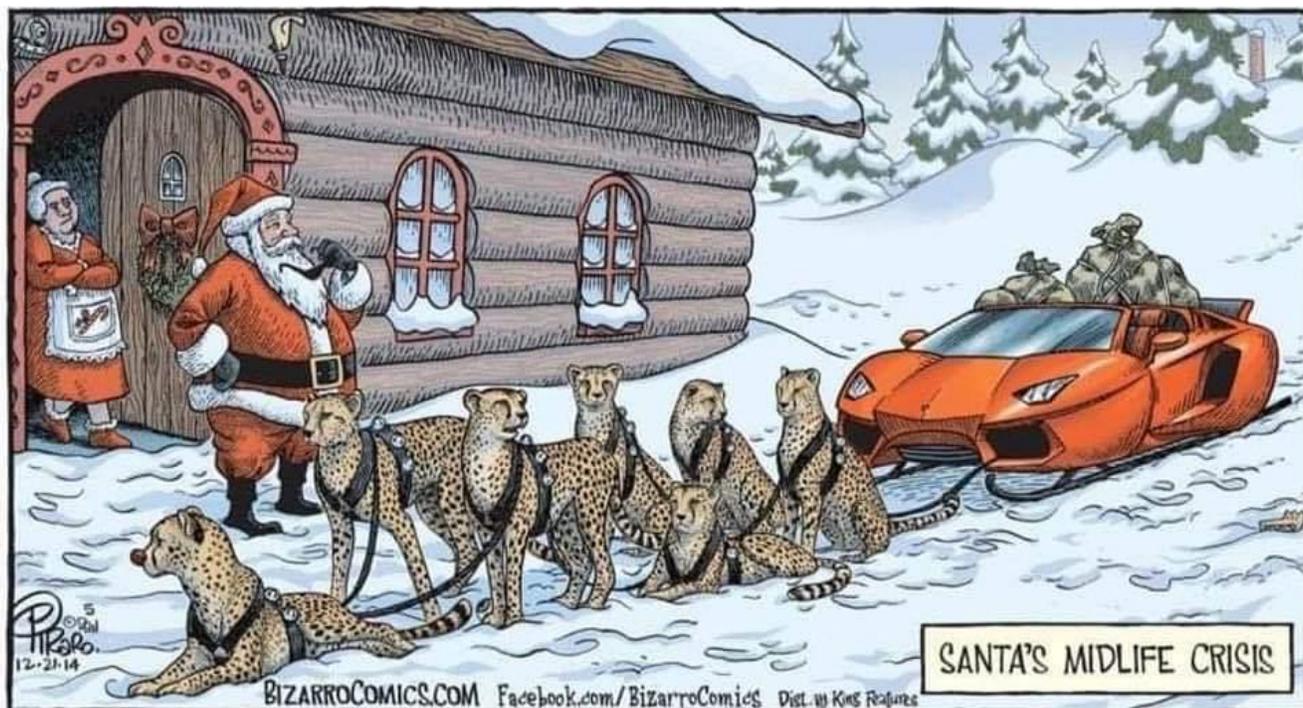


*[Video: Angola Game translocation](#)*



***November** We did two Angola translocations. The last one consisted of a total of 89 animals; giraffe, waterbuck, lechwe, impala, zebra and sable, that we took to a lush and green new home in Angola. The trip took us along impressive mountains and views, lots of potholes, some rain and more and more green as we went further up north.*





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