

# NEWSLETTER JUNE

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Dear clients,

We are already almost halfway through the year, and winter is really here! We hope you are keeping warm. In this newsletter, we explain how taking a nap can help animals survive through winter, and we give some tips on how to help your animals during the cold spells. We have an important update to share with you, Wildlife Vets Namibia is now a CC! We also give an update on the giraffe mortalities. Kind regards, Wildlife Vets Namibia team

## SURVIVING WINTER: TAKE A NAP!

The Namibian winter is really here! Temperatures drop, and we keep ourselves warm with jackets, blankets and a cozy fireplace. A luxury we have, but animals not! Animals do have different strategies though to stay warm. Some migrate to warmer areas, and some undergo physical changes, such as growing a thicker fur, building up fat reserves and piloerection (check our [July 2023 newsletter!](#)).

You probably know that some animals go into hibernation. Hibernation is a state of minimal activity; whereby animals reduce their metabolism, have a slower heart rate and lower their body temperature. The aim is to conserve energy during the cold winter months. Hibernation can take just a few days, to several months! There are different forms of hibernation, from a long deep sort of unconsciousness state, to light phases of inactivity.

True hibernation does not occur in Namibia. However, the Southern African Hedgehog (*Atelerix frontalis*) does undergo some form of hibernation. These hedgehogs have a heterothermic adaptation.

*Heterothermy* is a term that describes a variable body temperature regulation in animals. Most mammals, including us, are *homeotherms*, and maintain a constant body temperature. Heterothermic animals, such as the hedgehog, can fluctuate their body temperature, thereby adapting to environmental conditions.

The Southern African Hedgehog displays a typical form of Heterothermy, which is called *Torpor*. This is a short-term physiological state where the animal reduces its metabolic rate, body temperature and activity. This can range from a few hours, to a few days.

In a [research](#) that was done in South-Africa, they found that some hedgehogs could have a body temperature as low as 1°C! They also found that some hedgehogs went into a short daily torpor, while heavier individuals could stay in a longer and deeper torpor state. Depending on food availability and temperature, some remained in this torpor state for up to 4.8 days!

By adjusting their body temperature and metabolism, the hedgehogs save energy, which helps them to survive the food shortages and cold winter!



Southern African hedgehog near Palmwag, Namibia © [Dan Rosenberg](#)

# IMPORTANT UPDATE: TRANSITION TO A CLOSE CORPORATION (CC)

We are excited to share an important update regarding Wildlife Vets Namibia... We have officially transitioned to a Close Corporation (CC)! A very exciting time for us, but unfortunately it comes with some necessary administrative changes.

As a result of this transition, our **company name and bank account details** have been updated.

Our new details are as follows:

- 🐾 **New Company Name:** Wildlife Vets Namibia CC  
cc/2017/02632
- 🐾 **New VAT Number:** 07710027-015
- 🐾 **New Invoice Details:** Wildlife Vets Namibia CC  
P.O. Box 50533  
Windhoek

Our **bank account details** have changed as well - the new account details are listed at the bottom of our invoices. We can of course email you the bank account confirmation letter on request.

Please make sure to use the new details for all future transactions. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause. If you have any questions or need assistance, feel free to contact us! Our contact details remain the same.



## ANIMALS AND COLD WEATHER

For some a blessing, for others a nightmare... Winter is here! We hope you are reading this newsletter with a nice hot cup of coffee or tea ☺️ Animals have several strategies to keep warm, as you could read about on the first page of this newsletter.

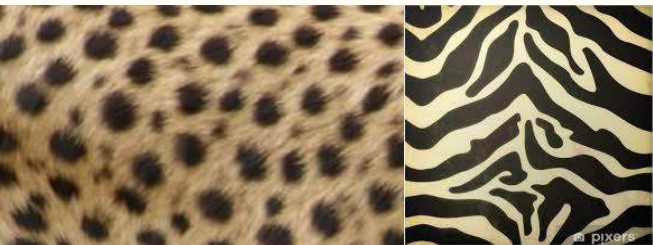


Few of the African antelope species have the ability to build up significant (protective) subcutaneous fat reserves. In addition, most are pregnant during our dry, cold winter months. This puts additional nutritional strain on the animals. Some species, such as kudu, nyala and warthogs are more sensitive to cold than others. We thus often see mortalities in these species (not so much warthog because they shelter in relatively warm ground boroughs) whilst frost bite and the dropping off of ear tips in sable, roan and nyala is not uncommon.

*The tips of these sable ears have frozen off. Under normal circumstances, blood carries oxygen to keep all tissues healthy. If an animal's body temperature starts to drop, blood vessels constrict → the blood is kept close to the vital organs. This means the extremities (such as the ears) get less blood. This lack of blood and oxygen damages the tissue cells in the extremities, and ice crystals start to form. Blood clots may start to occur, leading to further damage of the tissues. If this condition lasts long enough, the tissue dies off. This is what we call frostbite. © M. Bijsterbosch*

To minimize stock losses, a farmer has a few options:

- 🐾 **Maintain good body condition:** Make sure animals are in good body condition before the winter. Animals in a good body condition can handle winter weather and extreme conditions better than smaller or weaker animals. Cold and wet weather may result in a 100% increase in energy used to help maintain normal body temperature and function (this is especially true for pregnant and lactating animals). Failing to meet these needs may result in condition loss, stunted growth, poor milk production, weakness and death.
- 🐾 **Good quality food:** Ensure sufficient and accessible supply of good quality food to provide the animals with nutrients to maintain body temperature and survive cold temperatures. If you are aware of severe cold coming in, consider giving your animals a late afternoon meal of good quality roughage. You are not just supplying the animals with food, roughage fermentation by rumen micro-organisms results in substantial heat production. This “passive” heat from fermentation does NOT require any work from the animal – thus near zero energy consumption.
- 🐾 **Limit radical debushing** – keep sufficient shelter. We have said it many times in our newsletters, do NOT debush too radically. Bushes and trees provide cover and shelter against the elements; winds, cold, sun etc. Many game species hide their offspring for the first few days of life in dense bush. Browsers, especially the cold sensitive species such as kudu and nyala, are negatively affected by the reduced availability of browse as well as the lack of shelter. Many farmers try to literally eradicate the much-maligned blackthorn (Swarthaak - *Vachellia mellifera*). We would like to caution against such a radical approach since it is usually the first bush to start greening, flowering and producing pods following winter and thus providing essential food for browsers like kudu.



For game ranches we recommend structured debushing, in the pattern of a cheetah or zebra skin. Create open grass plains (the yellow part), interspersed with 1- 5 ha sized patches of denser bush (the black spots), where the animals can find cover from the elements and hide.

*Let nature guide you; natural patterns look more attractive for yourself, and guests.*

- 🐾 **Additional shelter:** Avoid excessive heat loss by providing insulation. For very susceptible animals (e.g., lambs and kids etc.) consider constructing a maze-like structure from stacked hay bales and hay bedding. These are very effective BUT, esp. for wild animals, must be constructed early in the winter (close to feeding and drinking site) to allow the animals time to get used to the structure and enter it on cold nights. Such a “maze” should obviously have multiple openings to allow easy entrance and exit. This is more applicable for livestock, however from experience we know that for example nyalas use and appreciate straw bale shelters as well.
- 🐾 **Buy animals from areas similar to yours:** When buying game, especially exotic species best adapted to sub-tropic or tropic regions (nyala, lechwe, bushbuck etc.), ideally source these from game ranches where they have been exposed to cold temperatures for a few generations. This gives some guarantee of the animals being more cold-adapted thus hopefully reducing your losses in a harsh winter.

💡 *Want to read more? Check out our [online](#) 'Animals and cold weather' article!."*

# GIRAFFE MORTALITIES UPDATE

Here a short update on the giraffe mortalities. If you are unsure what this is about, please have a look at our [May newsletter](#). Recently we did not receive many reports anymore of sick/dead giraffes, but this week there suddenly have been a few reports again. One of the reports mentioned a sick giraffe with the 'classic' symptoms, and fortunately samples were taken. We will therefore wait with sending the samples to Onderstepoort until we receive these.

We would ask all farmers once again to **please fill in the survey**, even if you have reported your cases telephonically to us. The survey will give us much better data for future purposes. It does not take long, we promise you they are not difficult questions, and you can answer in Afrikaans or German if that is easier.

A quick recap of the symptoms:

## Symptoms

Many farmers report finding dead giraffes, with some noting that only adult individuals are affected, while others observe cases amongst young females. Some farmers have observed giraffes being sick, or showing abnormal behaviour. Observations of the sick giraffes have been from a few hours to 7 days.

- 🐾 Physical signs: many farmers that observed sick giraffes report drooping/hanging ears. A few observed excessive drooling, discharge from the eyes, and some reported that the giraffe seemed blind. Two giraffes had skin lesions, which looked like Lumpy Skin Disease (this might be a coincidence).
- 🐾 Lethargy: giraffe stand motionless in the bush, showing no response to approaching vehicles or people.
- 🐾 Ataxia: giraffe appears to be 'drunk', stumbling over bushes and fences. Some indicate a staggered gait.

We have compiled a video of several sick giraffes, if you would like to receive it per WhatsApp or email, please contact us.



*Young heifer displaying lethargy and discharge from the eyes. It seems she was blind. We have seen three giraffes now with a food bolus stuck in the mouth. © Karen Codling, AfriCat Foundation.*

**Have you seen sick or dead giraffes on your farm?**

**Please assist us by filling in this short survey:**

<https://forms.gle/o3CYeA3rCqC4FZiw9>

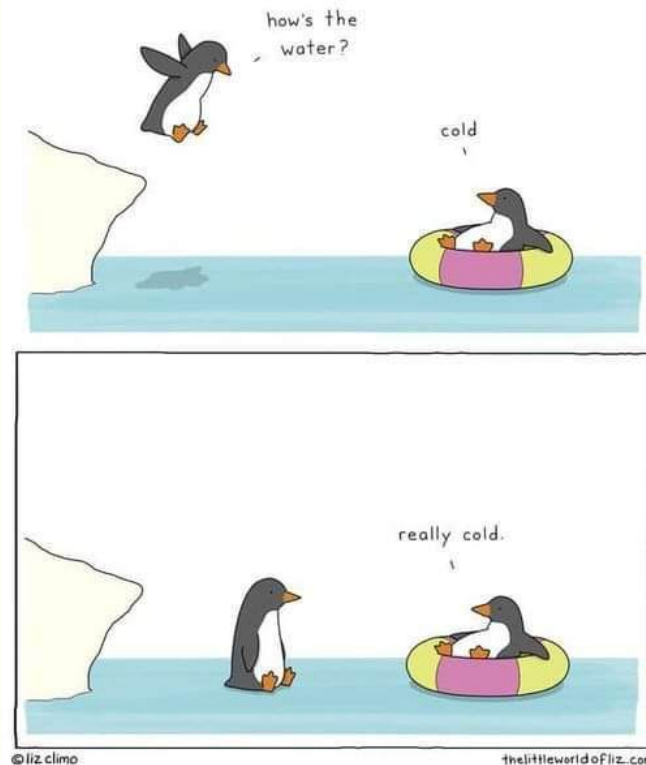
## What can you do?

We need your help to figure out why these giraffes are dying - you are the ears and eyes on the ground! We please ask you to assist us in the following:

- ✓ In case you find a **sick giraffe, or a fresh carcass (<12h dead), phone us!** If possible and not too far away, we will come out and do a post-mortem examination. We are ideally looking for sick giraffe which we would want to dart, collect blood samples and then euthanize it. This will assist in us getting fresh samples to be submitted to Onderstepoort for a range of tests. We will do this free of charge.
  - If we cannot come out, we will try to organize a colleague vet to come out.
  - If no vet can come out for a post-mortem, we will ask you to for the following:
    - Put on gloves 😊 Take photos of the carcass, do you see anything abnormal?
    - In case of a fresh carcass; open up the carcass and take photos. Again, do you see anything abnormal?
    - Check the rumen for bones
    - In case of a fresh carcass; cut of the head, and send it to Windhoek on ice (NOT frozen!). Speak to your vet about this.
- ✓ Take **photos and videos** of giraffes displaying abnormal behaviour, or from the carcass. Ideally, also send a GPS point, or indicate the approx. location.
- ✓ **Fill in our survey**. Even if you have already reported your findings, we kindly ask you to fill it in, as gathering consistent data across all reports will help us identify patterns. Feel free to share this form around.

**Have you seen sick or dead giraffes on your farm? Please assist us by filling in this short survey:**

<https://forms.gle/o3CYeA3rCqC4FZiw9>



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