

NEWSLETTER JULY



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Dear clients, we hope you are ready for a new newsletter! In this edition we explain how woodpeckers don't get a headache from all that wood pecking, and we dive into the different digestive systems animals have. August has some interesting days; the Wildlife Ranching Namibia Info Day is held on 08 August, together with a Caping Course at Nyati. On the 15th of August, The NAPHA Young Hunters will host their first-ever Wildlife Workshop Day. Maybe we see you there? Kind regards, Wildlife Vets Namibia team

HEADBANGING WOODPECKERS

When was the last time you hit your head? It was probably quite sore, it might even made a bump, or given you a headache. Woodpeckers do this all the time, deliberately! They peck trees to get to insects and other invertebrates living under the bark and in the wood. They also drill holes in dead or dying trees for nesting, and for communication purposes. Healthy trees can withstand the minor damage woodpeckers cause, so don't worry if you find one in your garden! But how is it possible that they can hammer their heads into a tree, without suffering from any headaches, or even worse, brain damage? As always, nature has found a clever way!

A human brain floats in a pool of cerebrospinal fluid, which acts as a cushion. Woodpeckers have a small **brain**, which is tightly enclosed in the skull with hardly any cerebrospinal fluid. This prevents the "sloshing" effect that causes concussions in humans.

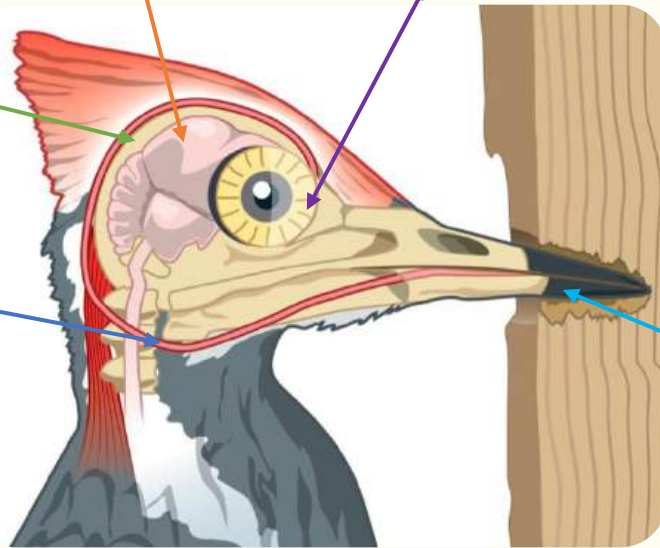
Woodpeckers have a thick nictating membrane, better known as a **third eyelid**. Every time a woodpecker strikes, the third eyelid is closed. This prevents woodchips entering the eye, it acts as a cushion to ensure the eyeball cannot pop out, and prevents the retina from tearing.

Woodpeckers have a thicker **skull** than most other birds.

The skull bones are plate-like, very strong, yet spongy and slightly flexible. It is filled with air pockets that help to cushion the blow.

The **Hyoid bone** connects the tongue and throat muscles.

In woodpeckers this is uniquely shaped; it acts like a seatbelt for the skull. The Hyoid bone is wrapped around the skull, and every time the woodpecker pecks, it absorbs the shock and stabilizes the brain.



Woodpeckers can hammer up to 20 times per second, on average 12,000 times a day. By doing this, they experience a G force of 1200. Special trained fighter pilots can only survive 10 G. © S. Janakarajan

The **beak** is well-designed. At the base of the upper mandible is a strengthening mechanism that prevents fractures. The outer layer of the upper beak is longer, while the lower beak has a larger bone structure. This asymmetry creates a dynamic that sends most of the impact pressure down to the (stronger) lower beak.

The area between the frontal and nasal bones have a hinge mechanism, that act like a shock absorber. Specialized muscles absorb the shock.

Estimates say that 99.7% of the impact is passed onto the body, and only 0.3% reaches the head.



The Hyoid apparatus is a complex structure of bones, muscles and cartilage that enables the tongue to stretch and retract. In woodpeckers it also wraps around the skull, forming a loop that acts as a flexible, shock-absorbing harness.

© [Avianreport.com](#)



WILDLIFE RANCHING NAMIBIA INFO DAY

It has become a yearly tradition now, the Wildlife Ranching Info Day is coming up again! This is a great opportunity to meet up with game ranchers, industry leaders and conservationists, and to learn about the latest trends in sustainable wildlife management.

📍 Event Details

- 🐾 **Date:** Friday 08 August 2025
- 🐾 **Venue:** Arebbusch Travel Lodge, Windhoek
- 🐾 **Time:** 08:00 for 08:30
- 🐾 **Fee:** N\$300 (includes refreshments)

🌿 What to Expect

- 🐾 **Presentations:** Dr David Pretorius (Veterinarian) – Buffalos: health, breeding and industry outlook; Dr Susan de Witt (University of Stellenbosch) – The original biodiversity finance: Can nature pay for itself?; Liz Komen (NARREC) – The vital role of vultures in Namibia's ecosystems; Riaan Oberholzer (MEFT) – Online permit system: the future; Georg Hellinghausen (Afri Drones) – Using drone technology for wildlife management; Richard York (WRSA) – Regional wildlife ranching collaboration and opportunities; Annette Oelofse.
- 🐾 **Networking opportunities** with professionals and enthusiasts from across the conservation landscape.
- 🐾 **Exciting auction** featuring accommodation vouchers, hunting packages, fine wine, rifle bags, and more!

Please make your reservations before 30 July: **Caren Winckler** – 081 211 7252
wildliferanchingnamibia@gmail.com

CAPING COURSE AT NYATI WILDLIFE ART

During the Wildlife Ranching Info Day, the caping course will be held as well at Nyati Wildlife Art. In this course, you will learn about professional field caping techniques. After you completed the course, you will receive a certificate.

📍 Event Details

- 🐾 **Date:** Friday 08 August 2025
- 🐾 **Venue:** Nyati Wildlife Art
- 🐾 **Time:** 07:30 for 08:00
- 🐾 **Fee:** WRN Members: 1st person FREE, 2nd person N\$350
Non-members: N\$350 per person

Please make your reservations before 30 July: **Caren Winckler** – 081 211 7252
wildliferanchingnamibia@gmail.com

YOUNG HUNTERS WILDLIFE WORKSHOP DAY

August is full of interesting days 😊 The NAPHA Young Hunters will host their first-ever Wildlife Workshop Day on the 15th of August at Bergzicht Game lodge.

It will be a fun day that includes plenty of opportunities to network, field demonstrations, interactive discussions and practical learning opportunities. Guest speakers will be Hannes du Plessis, Dr Ulf Tubbesing and Steph Joubert. Since you will be spending time in the bush, make sure you bring your field clothes!

📍 Event Details

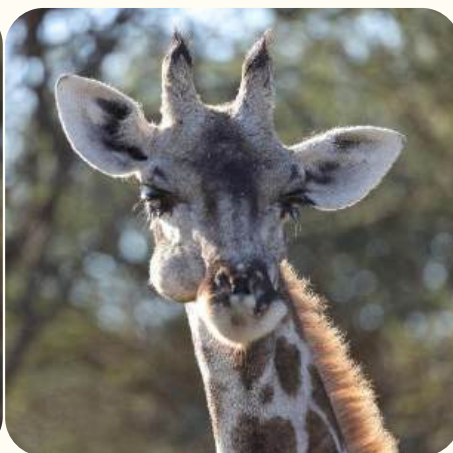
- 🐾 **Date:** Friday 15 August 2025
- 🐾 **Venue:** Bergzicht Game Lodge (near Dordabis)
- 🐾 **Time:** Arrive 08:30, start 09:00 until +/- 17:00
- 🐾 **Fee:** N\$150 (includes breakfast and lunch)

🌿 Topics covered

- 🐾 Wildlife feeding and licks
- 🐾 Wildlife management and grazing
- 🐾 The future of wildlife in Namibia
- 🐾 Introduction to the ART measuring system (beginner-friendly and practical)
- 🐾 Identifying antelope age and understanding uneven horn growth

Please sign up via: **Mariaan Kok** at 081 301 4475 / office@napha.com.na

GIRAFFE MORTALITIES



We would ask all farmers that have seen sick and/or dead giraffes in their farm 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.

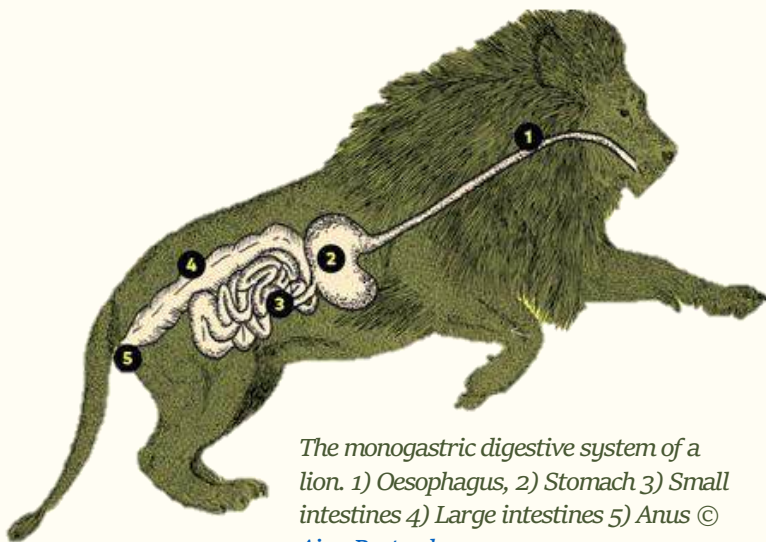
Have you seen sick or dead giraffes on your farm?

Please assist us by filling in this short survey:

<https://forms.gle/o3CYeA3rCqC4FZiw9>

DIGESTIVE DIVERSITY

We are lucky to have a wide range of different kinds of species in Namibia. Different species come with different digestive adaptations. From the giraffe that browses the treetops, to zebras that munch away on the grasslands and lions eating meat, each species has evolved a digestive system to suit its diet and lifestyle. In this article we give you an overview of the different systems. Remember this is a very complex topic, for this article we just focus on the basics.



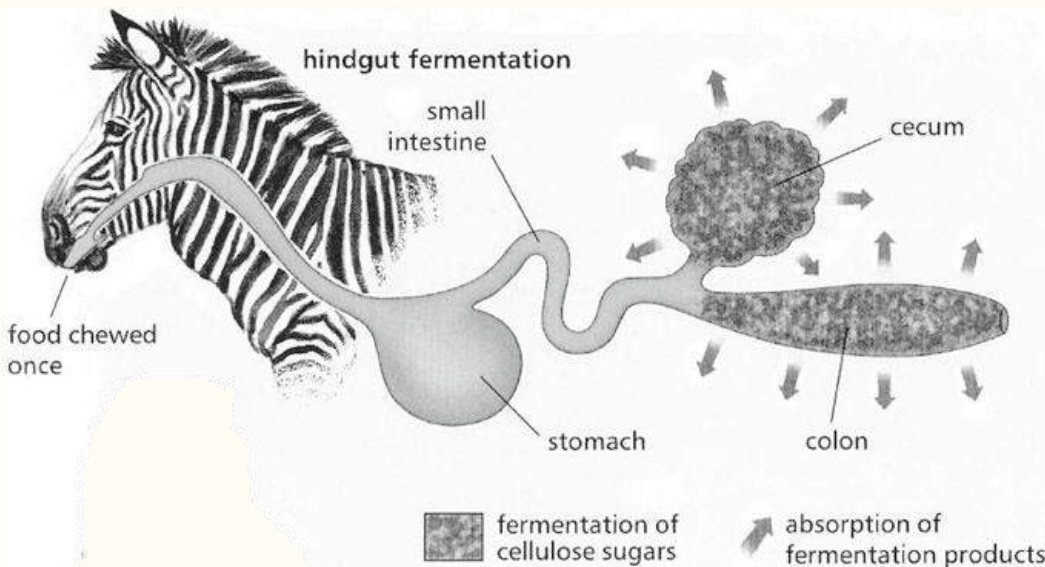
The monogastric digestive system of a lion. 1) Oesophagus, 2) Stomach 3) Small intestines 4) Large intestines 5) Anus © [Aina Bestard](#)

First we have the **monogastric digestive system**. Monogastric animals, including humans, pigs, primates and predators have a single-chambered stomach. Monogastric animals do not rely on fermentation, instead food is digested by enzymes and strong acids.

Since these animals generally consume easily digestible foods (e.g. meat, fruit, seeds, young vegetation), their body does not need a complex multi compartment stomach system. Digestion is quite rapid, making the nutrients quickly available which is important for species with high metabolic demands or active lifestyles.

The **hindgut fermenters**, such as zebras and rhinos, have a fermentation powerhouse behind their stomach. Food first enters a monogastric-like stomach, where enzymes begin breaking it down. From there, it travels through the small intestine and into a pouch called the *caecum*. The caecum is greatly enlarged in these species, and contains micro-organisms that ferment the food.

These animals do not regurgitate (regurgitate and re-chew). Instead, digestion continues uninterrupted in one direction, moving food from the stomach to the caecum. A hindgut fermenter can process double the amount of food that a ruminant would manage in the same time. This means that an animal like the zebra can survive on a low protein diet, by simply eating more. During droughts, however, this strategy backfires: zebras depend on bulk intake, while ruminants extract more nutrients per mouthful, giving them a survival edge when food is scarce.

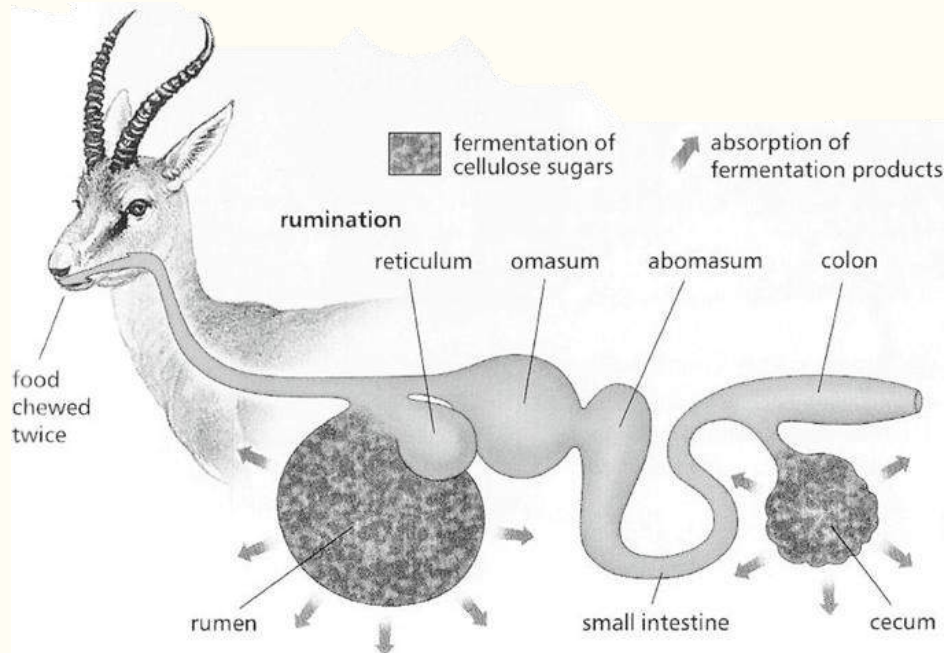


A hindgut fermenter is an animal that digests tough plant material using bacteria in its large intestine and caecum, after food passes through the stomach. © [Shorrock](#)

In ruminants (foregut fermenters) fermentation already takes place before it reaches the stomach. Examples of species are antelopes (e.g. impala, wildebeest etc.) and giraffes. Ruminants have evolved a superior ability to convert tough plant material (consisting of cellulose and lignin) to digestible matter by chewing their food again. This process, known as rumination, is a process whereby food is brought up, chewed again, and swallowed again, and prepares food for optimal microbial breakdown.

Within ruminants, there are a lot of anatomical and functional differences per species, these modifications have evolved in such a way that the most nutrients can be extracted from the food they eat. There are differences for example between bulk grazers such as the buffalo, and browsers such as the kudu. Grazers usually have a larger, more muscular rumen-reticulum complex, which is needed to tackle their high-cellulose diets. Browsers tend to have a larger abomasum and caecum and colon, which helps to digest the more nutrient-rich cellular contents found in browse.

All ruminants have one or more portions of their gut 'dedicated' to house the micro-organisms. Each compartment of the stomach plays a distinct role as can be seen in the table below.



A foregut fermenter is an animal that digests plant material using microbes in specialized stomach chambers before it reaches the intestines. © [Shorrocks](#)

Compartment	Afrikaans	Function
Rumen	Grootpens	Micro-organisms digest the plant material; they breakdown plant components such as cellulose, which is then converted to glucose.
Reticulum	Kleinpens / Netpens	A pouch-like structure, and determines whether the food is digested enough. When the food is not enough digested, the animal must ruminate.
Omasum	Blaarpens	Has many large folds, to create a big surface where water and other important nutrients are absorbed.
Abomasum	Melkpens	This last stomach compartment is similar to that of humans. Here acid and digestive enzymes are produced, which kills bacteria and breaks down more nutrients (e.g., proteins).

💡 *Want to read more about nutrition? Check out our [online](#) "Change, the driver of feeding behaviour in (wild) animals" article!*



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