

# NEWSLETTER OCTOBER

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Dear clients,

We hope you are well. In this newsletter we explain why some cats are spotted, and others plain-coloured. Then we have exciting news, we have been nominated for the Golden Star Award from Worldwide Vets, we hope you vote for us! Namibia fights for rhino survival at CITES CoP20, but the EU does not seem interested in supporting African-led conservation... We hope you share this far and widely! Lastly, why must we whisper around a sedated lion, but could shout next to a human in surgery? We explain the fascinating difference. Kind regards, Wildlife Vets Namibia

## SPOTS, STRIPES OR PLAIN?

Felines around the world have different coat patterns. Cheetahs have spots, leopards rosettes, tigers stripes and lions have a plain coat (some with dappling especially on lower abdomen and in young). These patterns are not just for show (nor an easy way for us to tell them apart...). Each pattern tells you something about the cat's habitat, hunting style and camouflage needs. To understand what shapes these patterns, scientists of the [University of Bristol](#) studied 35 wild feline species.

The scientists found that cats who live in dense habitats, arboreal environments (living in trees/frequently use trees) or cats that are active at dawn/dusk, tend to have a complex and irregular coat pattern, which is ideal for camouflage. The leopard is a prime example. Leopards thrive in rugged terrains, rocky outcrops and wooded areas. Their irregular rosettes match the dappled light and broken shadows of these type of habitats, helping it to stay hidden from both prey and rivals.

Lions on the other hand, have a uniform tawny coat that blends into the open savannah and grasslands. Unlike leopards, lions rely less on camouflage, and more on group hunting. The study found that plain coats usually dominate on open habitat, since the complex coat patterns offer little advantages.

What is interesting, is that the study also found that coat patterns in wild felines can evolve and disappear quite quickly. This means a species might gain or lose its patterns over a relatively short evolutionary timeframe, especially when their habitat or lifestyle changes. An example are black leopards. Leopards living in very dense forest sometimes develop a black coat (melanism) to blend in even more into the shadows. But lions that live on open grasslands rarely (if ever?) turn black.

While the study found a clear link between coat pattern and the environment, some cats threw a spanner in the wheel! Cheetahs live on open grasslands (where a plain coat is expected), yet they have kept their spots. Meanwhile, the Bay cat and Flat-headed cat, both Asian forest-dwelling species, have plain coats... While habitat and camouflage play a huge role in shaping the coat patterns of cats, they are not the only forces at work. Nature always has some trick up her sleeve, and genetics, behaviour and evolutionary strategies can sometimes 'override the rules' 😊



*Coats usually match the environment; a lioness with a plain coat in the Kalahari, and a leopard and her cub with rosettes in their coat in dense woodland. © M. Bijsterbosch*

# WORLDWIDE VETS GOLDEN STAR AWARD

We have been nominated!! Whohooo!! Both Ulf and Mariska have been nominated for the prestigious Worldwide Vets Golden Star Award. We are very honoured by this. The Worldwide Vets Golden Star Award is an annual award presented by Worldwide Vets to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to animal welfare or conservation. The award honours "everyday heroes" for their work in protecting, rescuing, healing, and advocating for animals around the globe.

Voting is open from 20 October to 13 November, and we would truly be grateful if you could vote for us!

You can click both our names when you vote  The winner receives £250 (which we obviously will share), plus £500 to a charity of their choice. We have chosen the Rhino Momma Project, a project close to our hearts! Let's bring the Golden Star to Namibia this year!

Visit this link to cast your vote:

<https://www.worldwide-vets.org/goldenstaraward>





## **EU ADVOCATES FOR THE SLAUGHTER OF RHINOS AND PROTECTING CRIMINAL SYNDICATES**

At the upcoming CITES CoP20, which will be held in Uzbekistan from 24 November to 05 December, member countries debate and vote on proposals to regulate international trade in endangered species. The decisions made will have a direct impact on conservation, legal trade and enforcement efforts.

Namibia has handed in a proposal for the CITES CoP20 to revise the trade conditions to the Namibian population of *Ceratotherium simum simum* (Southern White Rhino), which is currently listed under Appendix II of CITES. You can read the proposal [here](#). Namibia's goal is to allow a regulated international trade in:

- Live rhinos, only for in-situ conservation purposes
- Hunting trophies from legally hunted rhinos
- Rhino horn stocks from the government and private landowners, under strict controls.

Before the CoP20 has even started, the European Union has rejected Namibia's proposal to regulate the legal trade in rhino horn. Namibia holds a significant share of Africa's black and white rhino populations, with most roaming freely on privately managed farms and reserves. The relentless poaching and increased security costs have driven many private rhino owners to abandon rhino conservation. The result? A significant decline in available rhino habitat!

The ban on rhino horn trade was implemented by CITES in 1977. Since then thousands of rhinos have been poached, and rhino horn continues to be more valuable than gold. Neither the ban in the trade in rhino horn nor the implementation of specialized technologies and APUs, dehorning practices, the infusion of horns with radioactive material or chemicals, as well as extensive educational programs in Asia, have proven to be effective in eradicating poaching. This leaves the legalized and controlled trade in rhino horn as our last viable option! This is not to support the myths, but to undercut the black market and protect the rhinos on the ground.

The strongest opposition to regulated rhino horn trade comes from animal welfare- and rights groups, largely based in Europe and the USA. These organizations typically lack firsthand experience of Africa's conservation realities, and they have no personal financial stake in keeping rhinos alive. Their advocacy is shaped by ideology, not by the daily reality of protecting animals under threat. This disconnect is clearly illustrated by the EU's rejection of Namibia's proposal: a decision made from afar, without bearing the costs or consequences faced by those on the ground. The EU contributes little to frontline protection, yet at the same time it dictates policy from their high-rise buildings in Europe without offering viable alternative solutions to our problem.

Attached to this newsletter you will find a letter written by Alex Oelofse, owner of Mount Etjo and Member of HORN (Help Our Rhinos Now, Namibia). Please share this document around and educate others. As Alex Oelofse states: *"If Europe truly wants to save rhinos, it must stop dictating from afar and start supporting African solutions. Europe's decision is not neutral—it has consequences measured in carcasses."*

Click [here](#) to read our article 'Struggling to Survive – the Challenges of the Private Rhino Owner'.



# HUMAN ANAESTHETIC VS WILDLIFE IMMOBILIZATION

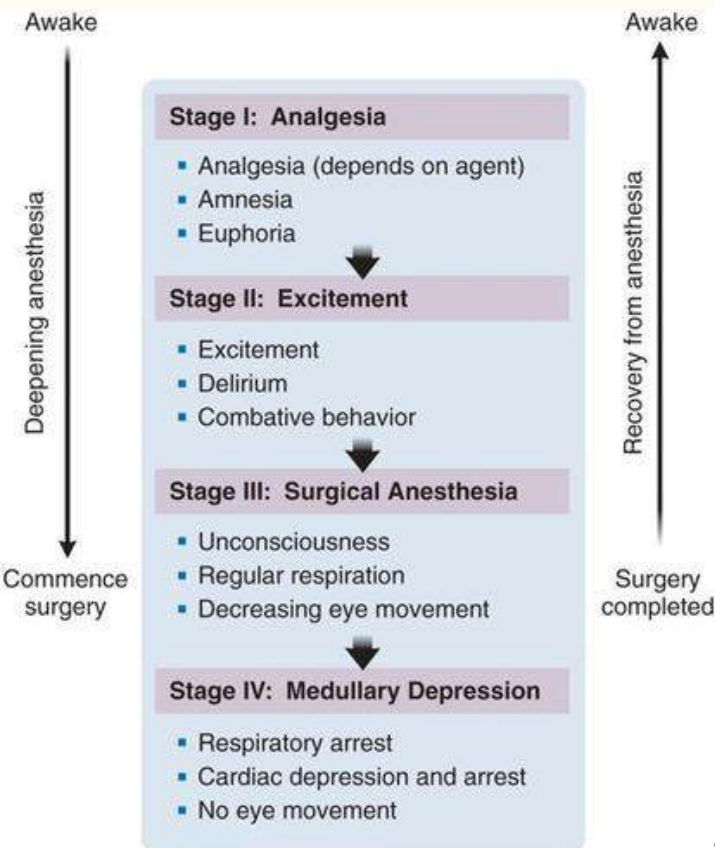
Recently we received a very interesting question. When we immobilize wildlife, we always hammer on the fact that people should be quiet. But why should we be quiet around a sedated lion, but we could play the drums next to an anaesthetised human, and he would not even notice a thing? What is the difference between the two?

First, both procedures have different goals. Human patients usually receive a full anaesthetic when they undergo very stressful or more commonly painful procedures (surgery) after they have been thoroughly examined and, in most cases blood work was done. These patients are fully anaesthetised, meaning they are unaware and unresponsive to their surroundings.

In wildlife veterinary work we very rarely have a chance to clinically examine, leave alone do laboratory work on patients before we immobilise them. Wildlife immobilization uses chemical agents (anaesthetics, sedatives, etc.) to temporarily restrain wild animals for reasons like research, relocation, or medical treatment to allow us to safely handle the animals. We thus try to create a safe window for ourselves; the animal must be sufficiently sedated/immobilised so we can safely handle, examine and/or transport the animal, and at the same time we try to minimize risks to breathing and other vital functions.

**Motivational Speaker:** "You can do anything, you just have to wake up the lion inside of you."

**The Lion inside me:**



On the left you can see the classic four stages of general anaesthesia.

- 🐾 Stage I: Analgesia - Conscious but with reduced pain perception
- 🐾 Stage II: Excitement - Loss of consciousness with irregular breathing, possible involuntary movements.
- 🐾 Stage III: Surgical anaesthesia: Unconscious, regular respiration, muscle relaxation — subdivided into planes.
- 🐾 Stage IV: Medullary depression: Dangerous overdose — respiratory and cardiovascular collapse.

In human anaesthesia, doctors usually target for stage III, in where surgical procedures can be safely performed. This requires a well-controlled environment, as the patient is not far from stage IV! Our wildlife immobilizations are, depending on what is needed (quick collar change or surgery), somewhere between stage II and III.

*The classic four stages of anaesthesia, described by Dr. Arthur Guedel in the early 20th century © [Quizlet](#)*

So even when a wild animal is 'asleep', it is not fully anesthetized like a human undergoing surgery. For a full surgical anaesthetic (where the animal is fully unconscious and unresponsive), one needs intensive monitoring and preferably an inhalation anaesthetic machine. This is typically only possible in a clinic setting. Because of the lighter plane of sedation that the animal is in, they can remain partially aware of their surroundings, and can still react to stimuli such as sound, touch, lights and especially pain. We are sure you have all seen the videos of a lion getting up once people start handling it – it happens to all of us! To help reduce visual stimulation and keep the animal calm, we often use blindfolds. It is a simple but effective way to minimize stress and prevent sudden reactions during handling.



*This lioness was immobilized, and a towel was placed over her head to cover the eyes. As Ulf tried to pull the dart out, she got up again! The most important thing to do in these circumstances, is stay calm. The lion is not fully awake and not aware of her situation. She just responded to the painful stimulus (pulling out dart). We stood still, she fell over and went 'back to sleep'. We did administered a top-up after this 😊 © Emily Tubbesing*

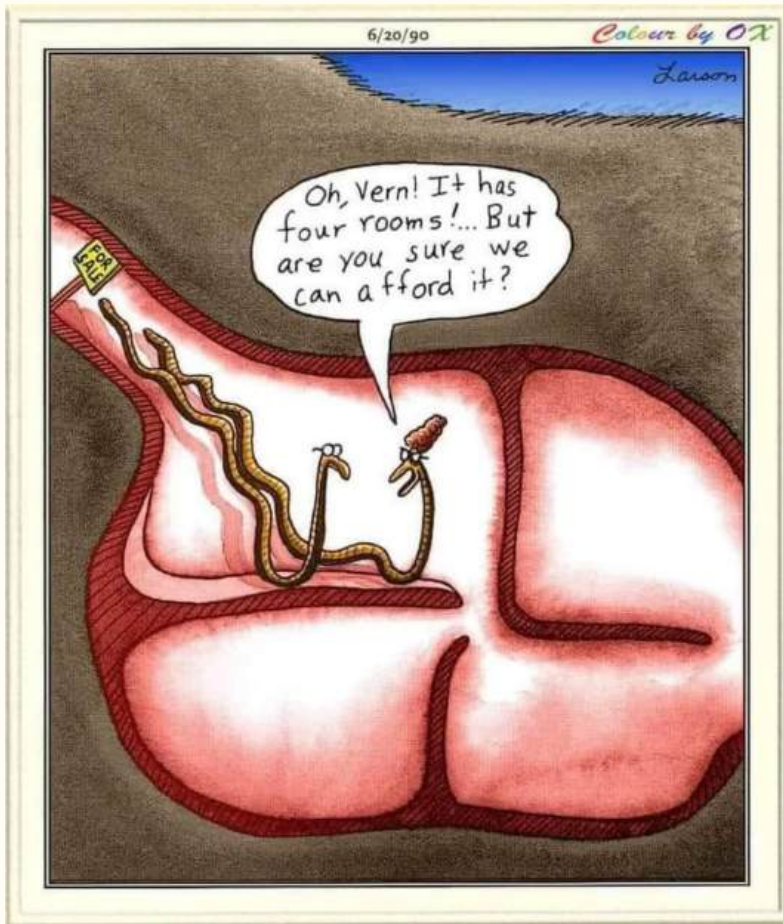
Next step you might think, are ear plugs. We generally do not use ear plugs, only in giraffe capture. Wild animals have incredibly well-developed hearing. If you have ever tried earplugs or stuffed cotton wool in your own ears, you will know; you can still hear. So even with ear plugs, the animal will feel vibrations (e.g. rhino dehorning), and sounds can still be perceived. Besides, it is not always easy to get the ear plugs deep enough into the ear canal to be effective. And once they are in... then you must make a 100% sure not to forget them! The best thing is to handle animals quietly, no shouting.

The drugs we use for wildlife are very different from those used in human medicine. In the field, we need drugs that work fast, can be remotely delivered (via dart gun or pole syringe), and can be reversed once done. Human anaesthetic drugs are designed for controlled environments, hospitals with IV drip lines, gas anaesthetic machines and full monitoring. For most species, especially antelopes, we rely on ultrapotent opioids, muscle relaxants and tranquilizers. These combinations allow us to immobilize an animal quickly and safely. And the best part... we can reverse them. Unlike humans, who wake up slowly in a recovery room, wild animals should be up and awake, and return to a normal physiological function as quickly as possible.

At the end of the day, wildlife immobilization is always a careful balance between safety and effectiveness.

*This impressive sable bull was dart immobilized, and down within 4 minutes. Sedated enough for safe handling, he was loaded onto the back of a car and transported for about 20 minutes to a new area. Upon arrival, he was offloaded, and given intravenous reversal drugs. Within 1-2 minutes, he was up on his feet, and without hesitation, he walked straight to the sable cows. Is it not amazing how these drugs work?! © M. Bijsterbosch*





Tapeworms in a cow's stomach

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