NEWSLETTER JUNE

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Dear clients,
Did you notice the number at the top? Edition 99! Can you believe it, next month we have our 100th newsletter! We have an exciting little competition; send us your nicest, funniest or most memorable moment of when we worked together, and perhaps you win a sand painting made by Emily Tubbesing! Next, an article with a big mouth! We also highlight the FMD Support Fund of Namibia, which has a useful website with lots of info about the disease and prevention methods. Lastly, we explain what a vasectomy is and why it's sometimes a good option. Kind regards, the Wildlife Vets Namibia team

NEXT MONTH – NEWSLETTER # 100!

Next month, Wildlife Vets Namibia reaches a special milestone… our 100th newsletter edition!

Years ago, Ulf occasionally send out newsletters to farmers, but as the work grew busier, this moved to the background. In December 2017 we decided it was high time to start again. First with a single newsletter, and from April 2018 with the monthly editions. Since then, we have not missed a single month (at least we hope so 😉)! That leads us now to 100 newsletters!

This moment is not just about us, it is about all of you who have been part of our journey! Over the years, you have given us ideas and topics that shaped our newsletters, and your support and enthusiasm has kept the newsletters alive and relevant. That is why we want to celebrate this milestone together with you!

We would like to invite you to **share your favourite memories, stories or photos** from the years we have worked together. Whether it is funny, emotional or just special, we would love to hear them!

The nicest stories and photos will be featured next month in our 100th newsletter. Even better… The best story will win a **Wildlife Vets Namibia goodie bag**, packed with a cappie, measuring tape, and – the highlight – an **original sand painting** made by Emily Tubbesing!

We are honoured to have Emily (artist, photographer and passionate story writer) as our judge, who will help us to choose the winning entry.

📩 Hand in your story and/or photo(s) before **20 July 2026**, and be part of our little celebration! You can either WhatsApp it to Mariska on +264 81 382 8473 or +31 6 4369 3095, or email it to mariska@wildlifevetsnamibia.com. We are looking forward to your entries!

Check out Emily's work on Instagram:
@emily_tubbesing

WILDLIFE VETS NAMIBIA

BIG MOUTH

Some animals impress us with speed, others with strength. And some animals impress us even more by having a bigger mouth that some people you might know 😉 When it comes to the biggest mouth of all animals, the Bowhead Whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) leaves everyone far behind! The bowhead whale is the second largest whale in the world, and is found in the cold waters of the Northern Hemisphere.

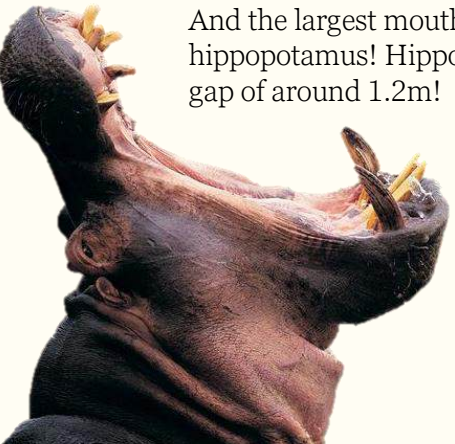
The mouth of the bowhead whale can measure up to 5m long, 4m high and 2.5m wide! Pause for a moment and just imagine how big that really is...! This is comparable to a barn door!!

Female bowhead whales usually measure between 16 and 18 meters in length, and males between 14 and 17 meters. The skull alone makes up about 1/3 of the total length. Bowhead whales weigh around 75 000 to 100 000 kg, and just the tongue weighs a good 900 kg. These whales also have the longest baleen of all cetaceans (type of marine mammal which includes whales, dolphins and porpoises).

Around 300 baleen plates, each measure 3-4m in vertical length, hang from the upper jaw like the teeth of a giant comb. When feeding, the whale opens its mouth and scoops in huge amounts of water and tiny prey like plankton, krill and small fish. The water is then forced out through the baleen plates, and the food is left behind.

The bowhead whale gets its name from its distinctive bow-shaped head. It is also known as the Greenland right whale. Historically, the term "right whale" was used by whalers who considered these whales the "right" ones to hunt, because they were slow-moving, they floated when killed, and provided large amounts of valuable oil and baleen. Early 1900s these whales were driven to the brink of extinction. In 1931 commercial whaling was banned, and populations recovered. Now, populations around the Western Arctic and Eastern Canada/West Greenland are stable and increasing, making sustainable harvest (in a tightly regulated aboriginal subsistence whaling quota) possible again. Populations around East Greenland and the Sea of Okhotsk remain low, and whaling is not allowed.
© *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc*

And the largest mouth of all land mammals? That is an animal a bit closer to home, the common hippopotamus! Hippos can open their jaws almost 180°. In a full-grown hippo male, that means a gap of around 1.2m!



Did you know that the biggest recorded canine of a hippo was 122 cm?! *Digital Vision / Getty Images*

WILDLIFE VETS NAMIBIA

FMD SUPPORT FUND OF NAMIBIA

Stop the Spread. Protect Trade. Unlock Access.

The new Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) Support Fund website is an important collaboration between the Namibian farmers' unions, the Directorate of Veterinary Services, and private partners. It aims to strengthen prevention, awareness, and rapid response systems against FMD. The website also offers practical information about the disease, as well as essential resources such as emergency contact numbers and guidance for farmers.

Have a look at the FMD Support Fund website here.

On this website you can also find a link to the RMIS Traceability Platform website. This website provides an interactive map of FMD incidents in South-Africa.

Authorities recently have cleared up the rules about people from South-Africa visiting Namibia. The three-day isolation period for hunters was dropped, however, it is important to remember that visitors from South Africa can still carry disease risks. Namibian farmers, especially those close to the border and/or those receiving guests from infected countries, need to stay alert and keep their biosecurity strong. Key points are:

- **Visitors & staff**: Limit access to your farm to essential personnel, keep a visitor register, and brief visitors on biosecurity rules.
- **Clothing & footwear**: Use dedicated gear on farms; disinfect boots after visiting other farms; quarantine staff if they have been in infected areas in South-Africa/Botswana.
- **Vehicles**: Keep vehicles away from animals; clean and disinfect tyres and undercarriages before entry. Livestock transport trucks must confirm disinfection before entry to your farm.
- **Disinfectants**: Always keep effective products ready (e.g. sodium hypochlorite - household bleach, mixed 3:2 with water, Virkon S at 1%, citric acid, sodium carbonate and sodium hydroxide) and train your staff on proper use.
- **Feed & water**: Source feed from trusted suppliers, keep water points clean, and avoid sharing water with neighbouring farms.
- **Fencing & animals**: Maintain perimeter fences to prevent contact with outside livestock; quarantine new animals for at least 30 days and monitor daily.
- **Record-keeping**: Track visitor movements, animal purchases, and vehicle entries to help vets trace disease quickly if needed.
- **Reporting**: Stay alert for FMD signs in animals (fever, drooling, lameness, sores around mouth/feet etc) and report any suspicion immediately to your nearest State Vet Office.

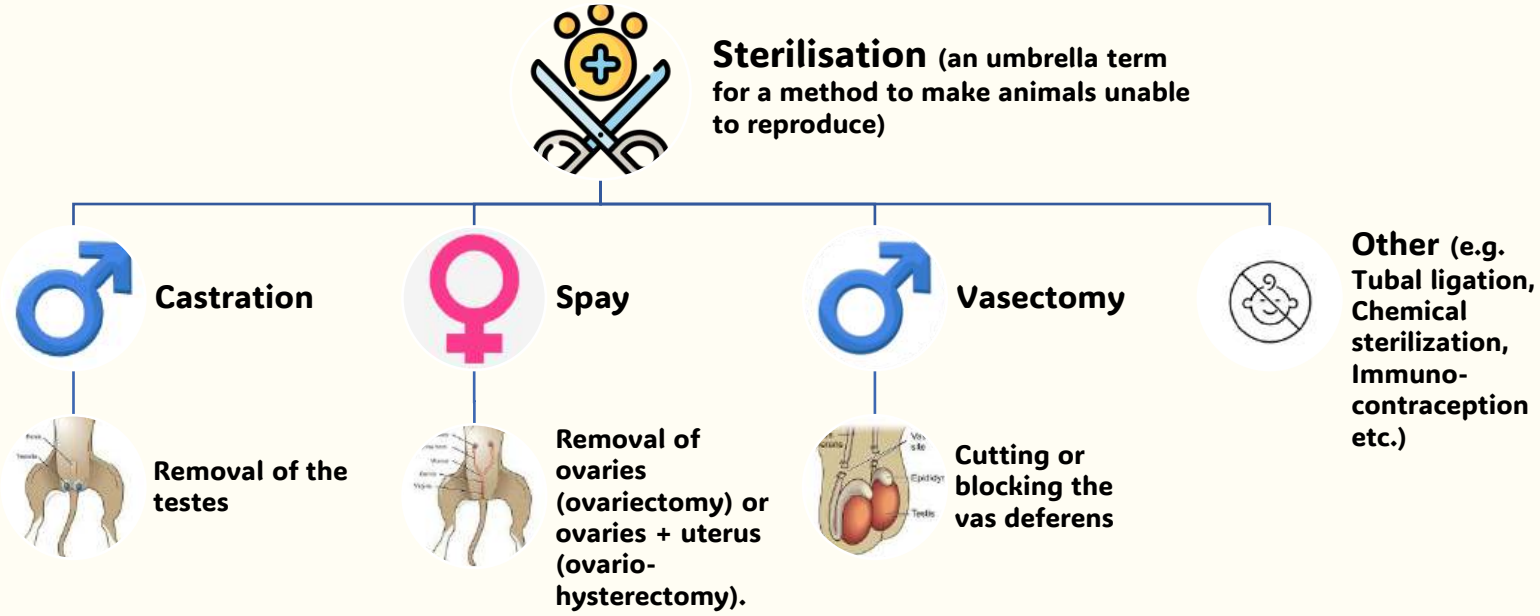
Keeping Namibia FMD-free is everyone's responsibility!

WILDLIFE VETS NAMIBIA

VASECTOMY

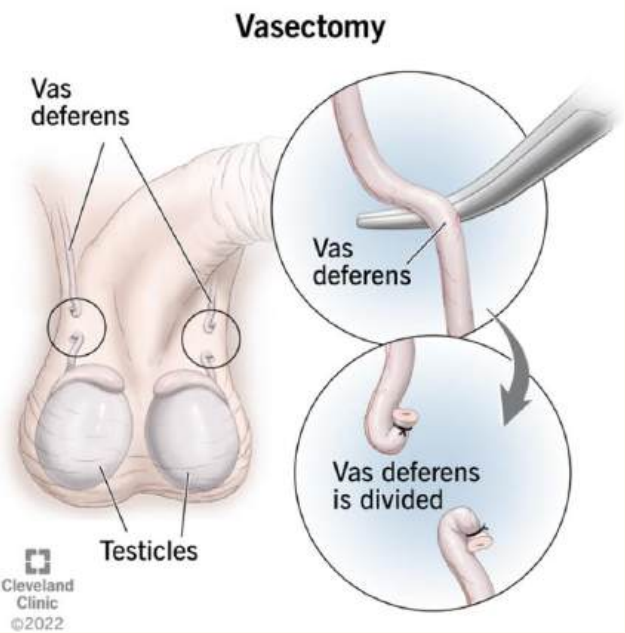
Recently, we performed a vasectomy on two lion males. A vasectomy is different from a castration, which we commonly do in dogs and cats for example. In this article, we explain what a vasectomy is, how it differs from castration, and why it is sometimes used in wildlife management.

Before we start, let's make some terms clear. In general, people often talk about sterilisation for female animals, and castration for males. Sterilisation is actually just a broad term which involves any method to make an animal unable to reproduce. The most widely used methods are:



Before we continue explaining the vasectomy procedure, it is also important that you understand the difference between sperm and semen.

- Sperm are the tiny 'swimming' cells produced in the testicles. They carry the genetic material to fertilize an egg (and thus to produce offspring).
- Semen is the whitish fluid ejaculated during mating. It contains sperm cells plus seminal fluids that provide nutrients and protection.



During a vasectomy, the vet exposes the ductus deferens (also called vas deferens). This is a muscular tube that carries sperm from the testicles towards the urethra during ejaculation.

This tube is then ligated (=tied off) in two places, and the short section in between is cut out. This means sperm can no longer travel through the tube to mix with semen. The testicles continue to produce sperm (spermatogenesis) but subsequently get broken down and reabsorbed in the epididymis (small tube that connects the testis to the ductus deferens which stores sperm).

This picture shows a vasectomy in a man, but the principle is the same. During a vasectomy the tube through which the sperm travels is cut. The animal is infertile, but hormone production remains normal. © *Cleveland Clinic*

WILDLIFE VETS NAMIBIA

While a castration is a quick and easy surgery (the vasectomy is a bit more fiddling around), we avoid castrating lions because this will make the males lose their mane!

Why does this happen? With a castration, the testicles are removed, and with that also the Leydig cells. They produce the hormone testosterone which is not only important for reproduction, but also important for the development of secondary sexual characteristics such as the manes.

The vasectomy only prevents the 'transport' of sperm, it does not affect the hormone production. The lion male continues to produce semen and hormones like testosterone. His mane, strength and social behaviour remain unchanged (which he would lose if we would castrate the male). The only difference is that his semen no longer contains sperm, making fertilization impossible.

Maybe hard to believe, but this was the twenty-year old male lion in the Kansas City Zoo named Mufasa. Mufasa was euthanized in 2022 due to old age-related issues. Why he did not grow a mane remains unclear, as we could not find any verified explanation. One (unofficial) story suggests he may have been castrated at a young age because his mother carried Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV), in order to prevent any chance of passing the disease to future offspring. © *Kansas City*

Possible side effects of vasectomy include the formation of sperm granulomas (small inflammatory nodules) and increased pressure in the epididymis due to continued sperm production. In rare cases, the severed ends of the ductus deferens may reconnect (recanalization) which can restore fertility. While these complications are well described in domestic animals and humans, they are less documented in wildlife.

A vasectomy is generally considered a permanent method of contraception, but it can be reversible in some cases. Reversal requires a second surgical procedure (called a vasovasostomy) which reconnects the severed ends of the ductus deferens. However, success is not guaranteed, and depends on factors such as time since the vasectomy and possible changes in the epididymis.

The reason why this procedure is sometimes performed in lions is linked to population management. In certain reserves or game farms, lions can reproduce faster than the land can support. Too many lions can lead to over-predation, increased conflict between lions and it puts pressure on neighbouring farms, as the lions might try to escape. By doing a vasectomy on the dominant male, the natural pride structure stays intact, but it prevents an unsustainable population boom.

Dr Ulf Tubbesing
ulf@wildlifevetsnamibia.com
+264 81 128 0350

Dr Maximilian Krings
max@wildlifevetsnamibia.com
+264 81 760 0577

Mariska Bijsterbosch
mariska@wildlifevetsnamibia.com
+264 81 382 8473

Facebook: Wildlife Vets Namibia
Instagram: @wildlife_vets_namibia
YouTube: Wildlife Vets Namibia

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