

## LETAMO WILDLIFE - LEAP YEAR - FEB 2008

### FROM THE WALLOW

2008 has been assigned "International Year of the Frog" – is it because it's a Leap Year? So look after those frogs – don't use tadpoles as bait – frogs and toads are endangered – look after them, don't run them over – drive slowly!

Anyway girls, this year you can propose to those gorgeous men who still have not popped "The Question" – so go for it! (Thanks to all those anonymous guys who sent me chocolates and flowers for Valentine's Day He! He!)



The fun part about doing this newsletter is that just when you think that there's very little to write about – something amazing happens – and since the last newsletter – quite a lot has happened! First Alex and Melinda saw a caracal run across the road one night in October – it hasn't seen it again. Then I saw a honey badger – fleetingly near Site 65. Otto then found a black cuckoo in the tree outside our house.

Thereafter there were just so many baby animals born this year – hartebeest, loads of springbokkies (probably celebrating with the Bokke), a bumper crop of impalas and then the zebras started having their foals – and last month the zebra foal that I have dubbed "Twinkle" – which looks very much like an albino with its blue eyes and blonde stripes! For moi, this is a real highlight and is very, very rare. I have called the foal "Twinkle" because he/she is my little star – and the light in this time of darkness – thanks to Eishkom!

If anyone photographs this zebra I would be very grateful if you would send the pics to me as I believe this has happened before on Letamo but the zebra reverted to normal colour. If this happens, there is a hitherto unknown colour gene at work in our herd. So please keep me informed.

And then, just when I was feeling soooo positive about Letamo came the email from Gary about the newly released chameleon being run over by a car on the farm. To say that I feel outraged is an understatement.

What is wrong with people that they have to speed on this farm? I get especially angry when I see shareholders speeding – what's your problem, guys? Why live on a game farm if you don't respect the lives of (so-called) lesser animals than yourselves? Sorry, I am still very, very angry about it....see article further along in this newsletter.

On a brighter note, may 2008 be an exciting and happy year for all – candlelight dinners and lots of braais are going to be the norm for the coming year/s, enjoy them and listen to the night animals – if you can hear them above the drone of generators! At least the light pollution will go away and it might be a good time to invest in a telescope to while away the night hours instead of watching television! Save energy – turn off your electric geysers between 5pm and 10pm.

Jill



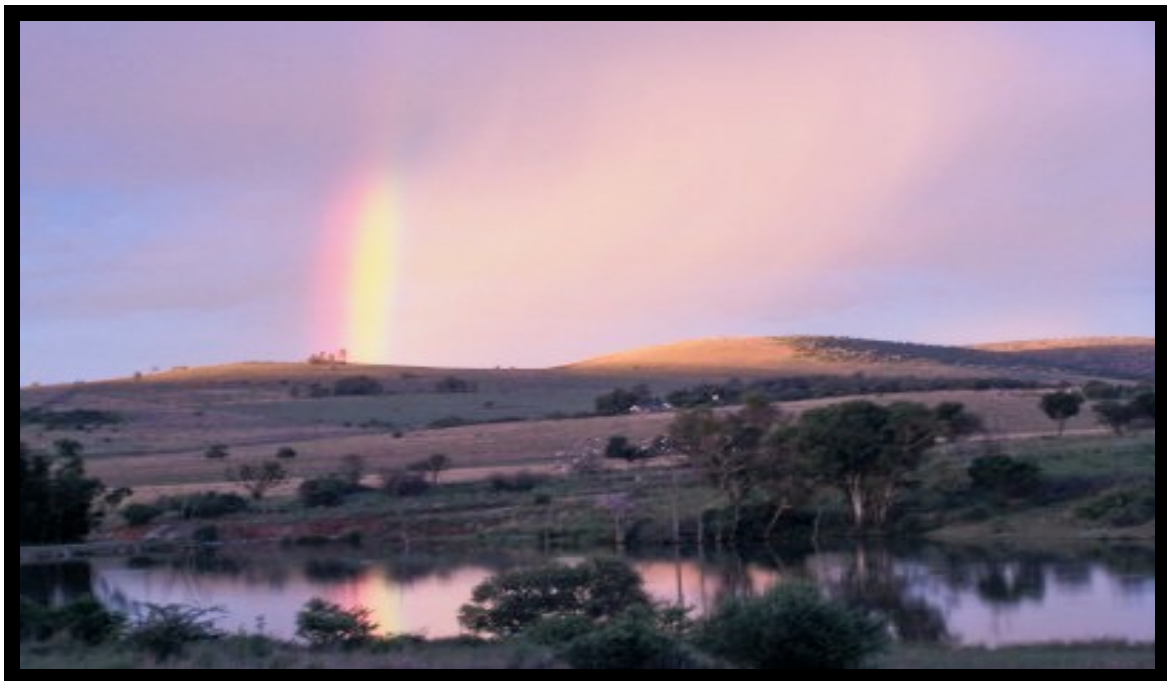
***BIRDING ABOUT LETAMO AND SURROUNDS:***

What's happened to all the birders? No contributions this time around. Ian has added Black Cuckoo to our bird list. Luckily one has taken up residence outside our house and has replaced the very irritating Piet-my-vrou (skiet my nou/ slit my throat), who used to call 24 hours a day last summer

I have a funny bird story. Last Saturday some of our Letamo kids were gallivanting about the farm when they found a nest with some birds in it – lying on the ground by Steenbok Dam. They took the nest home to Daddy and he asked them to bring the little parcel to me. So, Chene and Rayno (forgive this Pommy's spelling, asseblief) duly delivered the nest which looked just like an empty nest, so I asked them why they were bringing me a nest – and they told me that there were two birds inside. I thanked them for the 'gift' and proceeded to find some baby bird food and then took a look inside this tiny little nest. I got out my eggs and nesting book and I think that they are Red Bishop babies. I then opened up the woven nest and found no less than four tiny little ugly bald chicks inside. They were not interested in feeding, but, with a little persuasion I eventually got them to eat my special formula. I have now had them for five days and they now have feathers and recognise me as "Mum" and seem to be doing well! Keep your fingers crossed that our babies thrive and can be released back into the wild as soon as possible.

The funny part of this story leads me to the appeal that I sent out asking for a bird cage. Juanita Maree from Number 14 offered me her large outside bird cage, so off I went to fetch it. Inside there was a juvenile Fiscal Shrike. I duly phoned Juanita and told her that she already had a bird in her cage – but she said that she didn't have a bird? I then told her that the bird had a container of water – plus some bird seed in a little Tupperware. She was puzzled. Upon speaking to her gardener, Dinko, the shrike had got into the cage by itself, so the gardener decided to feed and water it so that it would be happy. Unfortunately Fiscal Shrikes don't eat bird seed! My gardener caught the shrike – and the shrike – obviously quite angry and hungry by this time – tried to eat Lovemore's hand! I checked the bird over – while it was still firmly attached to Lovemore – and then released it to fly another day! Thanks to Lovemore for his bravery – and thanks to Dinko for caring. Big Thanks to Gary and Juanita for the loan of bird cages.....it is truly appreciated!

Instead of beautiful bird pictures (Ian and Marie – stop slacking!) I decided to put in a picture of rainbow reflections after one of the first showers last year taken from my house by Tristan.





**TEENAGE MUTANT HERO ZEBRAS**



Photo: Marie McCrae – Letamo's Twinkle and Mum  
**On the right - Burchell's Zebra new born in Nairobi National Park, Kenya. See the mum does not have shadow stripes - just black and white.**

After the appearance of our special new zebra I went trawling through the internet looking for more albino or near-albino zebras. I came up with only two of them, both Burchell's zebra, but none of them were the Southern African Burchell's zebra with the shadow stripe. This little baby above was born in Nairobi National Park, Kenya.

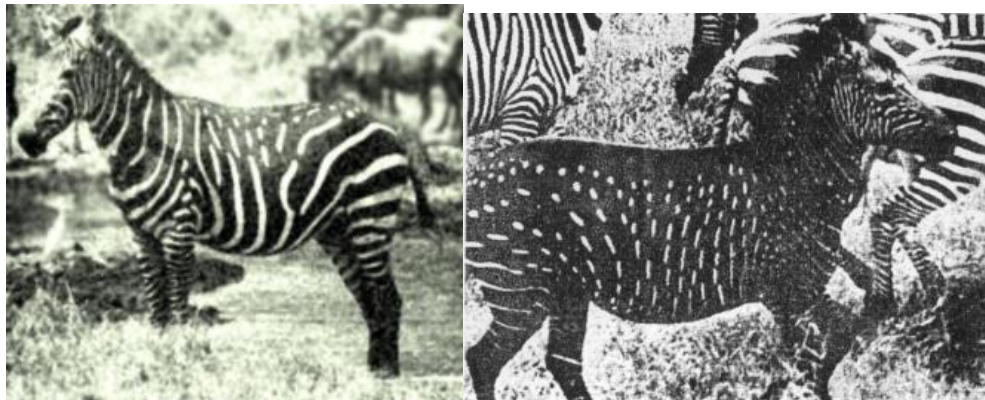
Then I remembered that there was great excitement during the 1960's in Zambia as a few black coloured Burchell's zebras were sighted in Luangwa National Park in the heart of the country. The pictures of spotted zebras shown below were taken there.

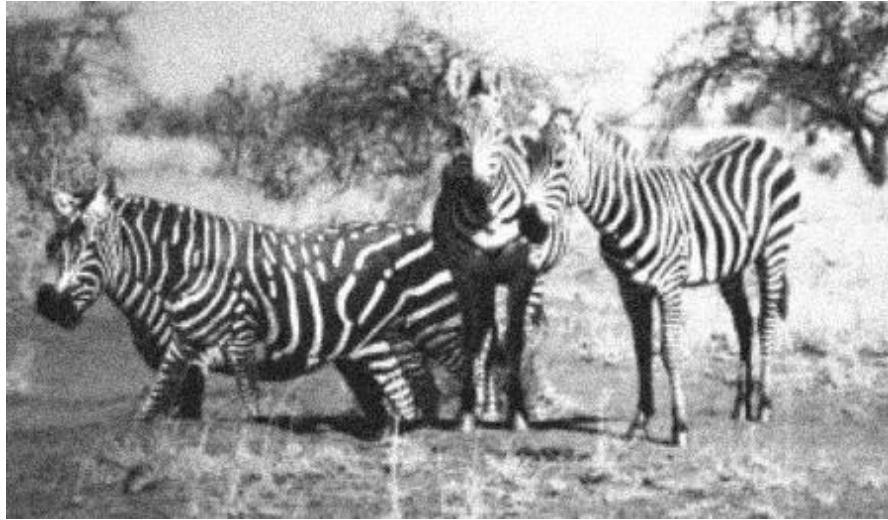
The picture of the dark zebra with three normal companions was taken in Tsavo National Park, Kenya, but there is no date.

How funky are these mutants? Really cool – I particularly fancy the one on the right! Aren't they beautiful?

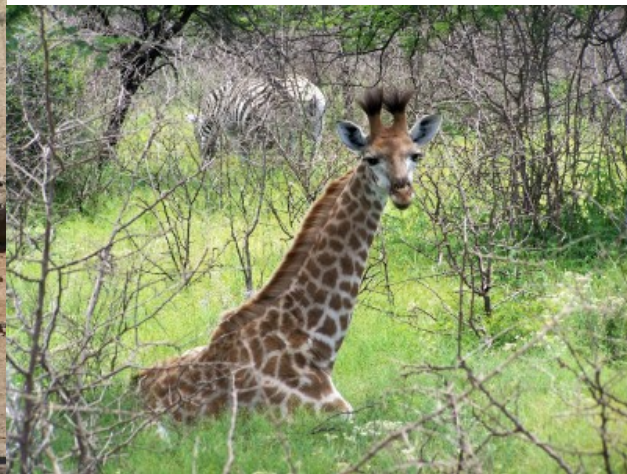
***The white gene is a double recessive – so 'Twinkle's' sire also carries the gene – interesting – this means that we may well have more white zebras born on the farm in future.***

***Any pictures you might take of Twinkle – please send to me – thanks!***



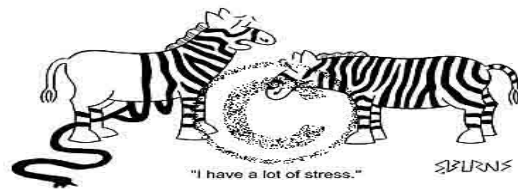


Tsavo Zebras



And speaking about mutant zebras – how's this photo I took of a giraffe near Satara in Kruger in July last year? Is he almost black, or what? I know that as giraffes age they darken – but this is the darkest giraffe I have ever seen, what about you? And how's this teenage punk giraffe photographed by Otto in Ithala Game Reserve – near Vryheid, Christmas Day 2007? Who says giraffes don't lie down? Please send me your funky wild life pictures to share!

**[Next Page: Comment from The Sunday Independent \(SA\), 20 January](#)**



### Hints from a Zimbabwean

What an incredible fuss you South Africans make about a few power cuts.

I happened to lie down next to my battery-operated satellite radio for a nap this week after the season's only two hours of summer whacked me out. I heard the likeable David O'Sullivan sounding unlikeable. Okay. He was in a rage, so angry he sounded as though he might burst an artery, or the membrane holding his brain in place. About Eskom. I couldn't believe my ears. As far as I can remember, in this past week there were only about six cuts, and none longer than five hours. Same thing at the pharmacy: moan, moan, moan.

Then it struck me - for the first time in my life I had really useful knowledge. I do know about electricity cuts and what to do about them. I know about boilers, paraffin fridges, wicks and lighting the lamps by pumping them hard at 5.30pm.

Please, South African householders, unless you live on more than an acre, don't get a generator.

There will be murder in the streets of Parkhurst, the Berea in Durban and Obs in Cape Town if home owners on tiny bits of land all have generators farting rhythmically through long days and dark nights. Even small generators use 1 litre of diesel per hour. And they get stolen easily unless cemented in and you need monster ones to do fridges and stoves. Leave generators to Raymond Ackerman and his like.

First rule for survival: get a solar panel on the roof, which is connected to an especially large car battery in your house, which is then attached to an inverter, which in turn has a switch that lights up the world. This system keeps a TV, DSTV encoder, DVD player, mobile and laptop chargers going. And it costs nothing to run.

The bigger the battery, the more lights. (Ditch desktop computers today.) It doesn't do fridges (more about fridges later) and it doesn't do electric stoves. Go for gas.

Mozambique has 300 years of gas, and the ANC government - even though it chose to do the arms deal instead of electricity - did put in a pipeline for gas from Mozambique. If you live in the older suburbs of Johannesburg phone up the angels (seriously) at eGoli Gas and they will look on the map to see if you have a gas pipe in your street. If you have, then get connected. Gas geysers also work at a fraction of the cost of electricity if you don't go for solar-heated water.

Refrigerators are another thing altogether. If you keep the doors shut, a tall one will keep food from going off during a power cut of about 30 hours. A deep freeze lasts about 2,5 days if you don't open it. Longer than that and the food goes off. After all, you can shop daily in South Africa.

Raymond Ackerman is going to keep the generators running.

Most Zimbabwe-owned supermarkets shut down during power cuts. Only foreign-connected

ones such as Spar have generators, or those owned by Zanu PF chefs (political elite), as they get cheap fuel.

You must conserve power.

You have a chance to do this because you still do have commerce and industry. We lost our industry over the past few years, so that sector can't really help much. We have more or less given up mining.

Except, except, and think about this. . . . . your mining houses can buy power with foreign currency directly from Cahora Bassa and pay in US dollars, as they are doing in Zimbabwe now. It is a bit more expensive than Eskom, but it keeps the platinum pouring out.

We also don't have any robots left in our streets, and little traffic, so we don't have the kind of traffic jams I saw along Jan Smuts Avenue in Jo'burg on Thursday during a power cut. We don't kill each other in fuel queues, and we don't have road rage as our roads are mostly gone.

Nor do we kill each other in banks, even when there is no money there, or in supermarkets. Well, only very, very occasionally, and only once, over sugar and that was in Bulawayo, which is very far from town.

So bear up, improvise and go get the solar, inverter, battery alternatives, and gas.

And you will all survive until you have enough new power sources within eight years, so I hear, and you are not going to be nearly as short of foreign currency as Zim, so can import some power.

. . . . . But Zimbabwe will recover sooner than South Africa, because our population is in Hillbrow.

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***XYZ Club - something for the kids!***



**The XYZ Kids on their September Birding Day. Nobody responded to my last appeal for adults who are interested in helping the kids to come forward, so I am not sure if you guys want this initiative to continue. Please let me know - Jill 082 441 5892.**

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***STOP PRESS ON BABY RED BISHOPS***



The four red bishop babies came to me 26<sup>th</sup> January – Marie took these pics on 6<sup>th</sup> of Feb – these babies were naked and blind when I got them – look at the difference in only 10 days!

It's a messy job, but mothers just have to do what they have to do!  
Thanks, once again to Juanita Maree and Gary Bennetts for the bird cage and aviary. Apparently it will be another four weeks until the babies are feeding independently and ready for release. They already fly perfectly, but will only take food from "mother" at this stage. It is quite a commitment to take on baby birds, so I always suggest that you get Freeme to take the birds – they have dedicated staff on hand 24/7 to look after the birds – I am just doing it because I have the time at the moment – and I enjoy raising and rehabilitating birds and mammals. Please don't bring me any reptiles! Freeme's number is 011 807 6993 – Above – **Bishops' Choir in full voice!**

### **DEATH OF A CHAMELEON**

**Here's a repeat of the letter that Gary Bennetts sent to all shareholders recently.**

'I released a Chameleon on the farm yesterday as a part of the on going release program to release more interesting animals on the farm (**See pictures on the website**).

Five Hours later I came across the same chameleon squashed on the road (See attached picture). Recently on a walk down our road I came across 3 carcasses of nightjars also squashed on the road, as well as two kiwits.

Everyday I watch one or two residents speeding past my house, doing at least 60 to 70km/ph. We all know who they are but it seems there is nothing we can do about them. It's a pity that a one or two individuals can spoil it for everybody.

*I have decided to suspend any animal releases for now, which is a pity, but I think the farm is unfortunately too dangerous for them.'*

Further communications between Gary and myself revealed that he was (past tense) going to release some appealing animals – not that any animals are more special than others. And I quote from Gary's email to me.

***"I was about to release some really interesting animals such as Otters, Cape Fox, Mongoose etc, but have decided not to as the farm is too dangerous for small animals because of the speeding."***

What a huge pity – and I must say that I agree with Gary – if we cannot control our behaviour, only we will lose out.



#### **Requiem for a Hedgehog**

It wasn't cars that killed him,  
Or viruses or bugs  
Oh no! You thoughtless gardeners,  
He ate your poisoned slugs.

***Please pardon the repeat (below) – but these weeds are again rearing their heads on Letamo.***

## POMPOM WEED : NOT A LOT TO CHEER ABOUT



Pompoms are the distinctive hand-held ornamental tufts that have been made famous by American cheerleaders. They bring connotations of applause, goodwill, possibly even excitement. Unfortunately, their namesake in the world of alien weeds and invasive plants provides starkly contrasting emotions for weed scientists, nature lovers and landowners.

Pompom weed *Campuloclinium macrocephalum* is an invasive weed of grasslands that threatens conservation and agriculture in South Africa. A member of the daisy family (Asteraceae), this South American overstayer is rapidly displacing native species, reducing both the biological diversity and carrying capacity of vleis and veld. Infestations become conspicuous when the plants are in flower, usually between December and March, transforming the landscape from green to pink. The plant initially

establishes itself in disturbed sites, such as roadsides, but then invades grasslands, open savannah and wetlands.

Is this species worth our concern?

Modelling exercises indicate that the potential distribution for pompom weed includes the majority of KZN Province. Anecdotal evidence from farmers, conservation officers, ecologists and WESSA members strongly suggest that this weed has already begun to fulfil its full potential.

Pompom weed is a perennial erect herb that grows up to 1.3m high. Stems and leaves are covered with rough bristly hairs. Leaves are scattered along the stem but are clustered at the base to form a rosette. The showy pink flower-heads are produced in dense clusters at the end of aerial stems. Each flower-head consists of hundreds of tiny, star-shaped florets surrounded by purple bracts.

## **PICK UP YOUR LITTER - AND ANYONE ELSE'S YOU FIND ON LETAMO**

### **SUNSET BRAAI AREA -**

The Sunset Braai Area must be booked. This can be done by contacting the LE office.

### **\*REGISTER ON LETAMO WEBSITE & MAILING LIST\***

Go to: <http://flame.co.za/mailman/listinfo/residents> to register.



Owl nesting boxes for sale – attract barn owls, spotted eagle owls to your house. Owls will control your rodent population on your stand. Owl Boxes are made by David Jeppe – R300 each. For more details, contact Marie McCrae on 083 302 6228.

For fabulous catering and party and function co-ordination, contact Tristan at Food Glorious Food Caterers – 082 363 6063

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