

## LETAMO WILDLIFE – AUGUST 2006



### FROM THE WALLOW

Well, the Mars thing may have been a hoax – but it definitely snowed at the farm on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August! Wonder what the hippos thought of it? Unfortunately there was such a strong wind blowing, and the snowflakes were so tiny and light, the snow never settled, but it was fun for our staff anyway – but one of our guys thought he would die from the cold! “Eish, snow, this thing can kill a person!” Pity we couldn’t build snowmen, but it was quite magical anyway – nature, she is sooo lovely!

Yesterday (14<sup>th</sup> August) I saw my first babies of the year, an Egyptian goose marched right past our house honking her head off with three little goslings in close pursuit. They waddled along behind her through the long grass, tripping and tumbling over with their little wings stretched out trying to balance themselves, looking much like the March of the Penguins, never mind goslings! So funny and a lovely sight to see, definitely one of those Ooh! Ah! Cuddly moments.

That is what is so special about living on Letamo, there is always something new to see when one is least expecting it. You just need to open your eyes and ears. My sighting of the month was of a yellow mongoose – my first on Letamo! (Maybe it was a Free me release)

By the way, thanks for all the compliments on the newsletter, they really help keep me going – but please do contribute yourselves, I am sure everyone here has a special tale to share.

Stay well,

Jill



Gary's photo of our yellow mongoose

### LETAMO LETTERS AND TALES:

#### Homesickness, hoaxes, hisses and hoots...

Thank you so much for co-ordinating this newsletter, and your invaluable contributions. Moira and I lived at Letamo for a few years before moving to Lagos about a year ago. We loved living on Letamo and we will hopefully build within the next year and reside there again. Your newsletter makes us very 'homesick' and rekindles so many wonderful memories of Letamo, one starts to appreciate when residing in Lagos.

Gavin and Moira Young  
Stand 67

This newsletter was one of the best things that I have read this year. It is so great to know that so many people share the same passion for Letamo as we do. We can't wait to move in. Thanks for an excellent newsletter

Deon Schoeman

Firstly, I love reading your newsletter. It is interesting and informative, keep up the good work. Secondly, I nipped your address from Melinda's email so I can share what I have found. For you guide, I have received a few messages with the Mars claim and a few more claiming its a hoax.

Sandy Greybe



Photos : Alex Basson

Sometime last year, Patricia Riekert was driving home with her two children and found this enormous python in the road. She excitedly called Alex who managed to take these shots before the snake slithered away to find dinner!

Somehow I lost Ingrid Povey's letter somewhere in my inbox, but she wrote to let us know that there is a resident owl in the chapel. Poor fellow gets a bit panicky whenever somebody enters and flaps around a bit, but he obviously has access in and out as Ingrid has to clean up the remains of his dinners before services! Anyone want to go and identify the owl? I haven't had time, but I think it must be a barn owl. At least she doesn't have Bats in her Belfry!

Thanks, Ingrid.

ooOoo

### LHOA FUN DAY



Somehow the weather managed to recover to endow our fun day on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August with some watery sunshine and the day turned out quite fine. The kids had loads of fun riding the horses, whilst the adults and older children were entertained by Jonathan Leeming, the scorpion expert. Gluwein helped warm the cockles of the old hearts as folks stayed on to have a later-than-planned braai, with the last folks leaving at about 10.30 p.m. It was lovely getting to know such a wide diversity of people. Special thanks to Jacques Hattingh for his delicious braai sauce to go with the pap!

ooOoo

### *"What is a crocodile ? "*

Answer:

The croKodil is a specially built so long because the flatter the better swimmer.

At the front of the croKodil is the head.

The head exists almost only of teeth. Behind the croKodil the tail grows.

Between the head and the tail is the croKodil.

A croKodil without a tail is called a rottweiler.

A croKodil's body is covered with handbag material.

He can throw his tail off if he gets a fright but it doesn't happen much because a croKodile is scared of nothing.

A croKodil stays under the water because if you were so ugly, you would also stay under the water.

It is good that a croKodil stays under the water, because a person gets such a big fright if a crokodil catches you ... he first has to rinse you off before he can eat you.

A croKodil isn't hardly as dangerous as people say he is, except if he catches you.

The longer he bites you, the more it hurts.

Very old croKodils suck their people and buck that they catch dead.

If you eat him, he is a croKosatie.

A croKodil did not learn to swim with his arms so he uses his tail.

The little brother of the croKodil is a lizard.

The slow sister of the crokodil is a chameleon.

The gay brother of the croKodil is a daffodil.

And the croKodil also has a dead brother, the frikkadil.

ooOooo

### **SEPTIC TANK MAINTENANCE**

Melinda Basson got this from a manufacturer of septic tanks:

"A genuine septic tank is very easy to maintain, providing the users are aware that a septic tank uses a biological process to function well, and this involves ensuring that everything that enters the septic tank is, by nature, biodegradable. This practically eliminates the poisoning factory as one only has to ensure that your toilet cleaner, and all other matter going down the toilet, is biodegradable. All cleaning materials should be marked on the container as either "biodegradable" or "septic tank friendly", and then one can't go wrong.

All the enzymes and bacteria required by the septic tank are contained in the human waste by their millions. This process creates fluids from the solids.”

One of our residents swears by pouring a litre of sour milk into the system before going away on holiday to release enzymes into it, and another puts in a chunk of raw meat. You can also buy compost starter and pour that into the system while away.

ooOOoo

### **RELEASES OF REHABILITATED ANIMALS ON LETAMO**



I have been a Free Me volunteer for a few years now, and am involved mainly with their reptile removals. Free me is a rehabilitation centre based in Rivonia and rehabilitates anything from mice to antelope to reptiles, birds and small predators. If any residents come across any injured animals or birds that have fallen out of nests, Free me can be contacted on 011 807-6993. Their website is [www.freemewildlife.org.za](http://www.freemewildlife.org.za).

#### Released on Letamo:

- \* + - 80 hinged and leopard tortoises.
- \* 2 x Spotted Genets
- \* 2 x Porcupines
- \* 8 x Egyptian geese
- \* 1 x Terrapin.
- \* 1 x Yellow mongoose
- \* 1 x Rock monitor and 1 x Water Monitor
- \* 3 x Hedgehogs



We often come across the tortoises while mountain biking or walking. Their white numbers painted on their shells are an indication that they are Free Me releases. Some of these numbers

have now faded. If you come across any tortoises please leave them where they are and DO NOT take them home. They are quite happy in their environment and have been released at Letamo from captive environments. The porcupines often carry out midnight raids on our village's vegetable gardens, and have recently been seen by some residents. We often see evidence of them digging for bulbs in the veld. We often come across the yellow mongoose that was released in the quarry area.

Please advise the residents that if any one has any unwanted reptiles that they want removed, they are more than welcome to contact me and I'll come collect them with pleasure and release them where they are not going to be a nuisance.

Gary

No 45 Letamo

Thanks Gary, do you know if there are any more yellow mongooses on the farm? - Jill

ooOOoo

**BLACK WILDEBEEST** *Connochaetes gnou*  
(also called *White-tailed Gnu*)

Height at shoulder	compared with	BLUE WILDEBEEST
Males: 1.2m		1.5m
Females: 1.116m		1.4m
Weight		
Males: 161Kg		250Kg
Females: 130Kg		180Kg
Apart from size, no sexual dimorphism.		
Life expectancy + - 20 years.		
Gestation – 8 months		



Body of pony, horns of cow, tail of horse, beard of goat, and skittish of nature, the San Bushmen named this mixed-up animal "Gnu" after its odd bellowing snort with a metallic ringing sound.

This little wildebeest is endemic to Southern Africa south of the Limpopo, previously ranging in very large numbers throughout the grassland and karoo sub-regions of Northern Cape, Free State and the former southern Transvaal, as well as the Drakensberg of KZN, western Lesotho and western Swaziland. But due to the pressure of agriculture and excessive take-off by hunters, numbers were down to 1,800 by as recently as 1965.

These animals can interbreed with Blue Wildebeest, so the two species should never be kept together on the same turf. This is probably because the two species are so closely related and their breeding biology so similar – any offspring is also fertile. This has already happened in the Drakensberg, where it was first observed and this fertile hybridization poses a threat to the integrity of both species, although the hybrids most closely resemble the blue wildebeest.

Today, due to the escalation in game farms versus agriculture, there are an estimated 13,000 Black Wildebeest, nearly all living on private land.

Socially black wildebeest organise themselves into three groups – territorial males (usually solitary), bachelor males of all ages which form small herds from which the next territorial bull will emerge, and herds of cows with young.

Territorial bulls make a loud honk call during day and night. All wildebeest give warning snorts – usually just before taking off in a mad gallop – these animals are easily spooked (even just by a strong wind) and stampede – bucking and prancing and looking around to see what they are running away from – usually just a figment of their imaginations, as most of these animals live in predator-free situations today.

Black Wildebeest are seasonal breeders, mating from March to April and synchronised calving within a three week period occurs between mid-November to January. Calves are usually born in the morning and are up and running with their dams within about 20 minutes. Calves are able to join in the stampedes shortly after birth, staying close to their mothers and running as fast as the herd.

One of the challenges of keeping Black Wildebeest is the fact that they tend to stay in the same area – usually where they have good visuals of any impending danger, rather than for the quality of the grazing. This very often results in overgrazed and trampled grassland, and its attendant management problems.

ooOoo

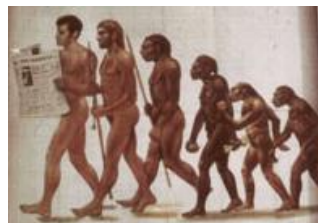
### Noise pollution



Otto and I are very fortunate where we live to have quiet neighbours, but do have problems with the village on a neighbouring farm – some weekends their really loud music goes on all day and then until well after midnight! Talk about spoiling the feeling of being on a game farm. That's just it, the ethos of Letamo is to have the privilege of living close to the hub of South Africa whilst experiencing the magic and tranquillity of the veld. This means that we all have to make an effort to keep the music down so that we don't spoil this special place for our neighbours, and surely excessive, incessant noise must disturb the animals too.

According to the Health Inspector at Mogale City, the cut-off time for any loud music or noisy disturbance in the Kromdraai area is 22h00 from Monday to Sunday. If noise goes on after this time you can lodge a complaint at 011 411 5000. Action against the perpetrators will be taken.

ooOoo



### BOOKS

A Guide to Sterkfontein and the Cradle of Humankind  
By Lee R Berger and Brett Hilton-Barber  
(Struik) R80.00

(The Citizen, 10<sup>th</sup> August 2006, Reviewer – Dries Brunt)

This guide is a good introduction to South Africa's most treasured World Heritage Site, the Cradle of Humankind.

With its many illustrations, the booklet describes the sites near Krugersdorp, Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, Kromdraai and others that have yielded clues to unravel man's ancient ancestry.

World famous scientists, men like Dart, Broom, Robinson, Brain, Tobias and many others faced scientific ridicule when they postulated, with vision and dedication, that humanlike beings, precursors of modern men, roamed the veld right here on our doorstep more than three million years ago. The English wanted the first man to be British, but we beat them to it!

This guide has the potential for both young and old, to excite a lifelong curiosity in an incredibly interesting field of science where the last word has not yet been spoken.

## Game News



Since the last newsletter one of the newly introduced eland bulls from Delareyville was found lying down and very ill in the residential area. Unfortunately, this poor animal had to be put down to relieve its suffering and the vet took blood samples which were sent to Onderstepoort Veterinary College for investigation and research. (This means that the tests were done for free – at no charge to the game farm). The tests came back that it had succumbed to a tick-borne disease.

One young eland bull had a bit of an adventure by falling into an old empty swimming pool in the Letamo Township area. Apparently workers on the site had failed to shut the gate. Happily, said eland was successfully extricated without injury and lives to face more adventures in the future!

With new kudu on order, the game farm is also going to reap the benefits of fresh genes with the arrival of six blesbok from the Bapsfontein area. The blesbok that were already on the farm came from the Krugersdorp Game Reserve so they will all benefit from these new additions. It was supposed to be a consignment of six females – but somehow one turned out to be a male – if only they were easy like kudu, waterbuck and impala where the females lack horns! Actually some female kudus do have horns, but they are usually small and look a bit like antlers-gone-wrong!

## Indigenous Gardening

Having bragged about my wild pear *Dombeya rotundifolia* in the last issue – it looks as though the poor thing has dropped down dead from the cold this winter – I am so upset as it was quite big and looking stunning until winter set in. I wrapped it up a bit late though, because I don't think anyone was expecting that early cold snap in May – and down here at the dam we get some mean frost! Why do you think we have a VERY natural-looking veld garden?

Anyway, one of our best contributors, Marie McCrae has this to share with us – and it makes a lot of sense and it is water-wise too!

### MOM'S RECIPE FOR HAPPY TREES

“My mom was a botanical artist who wrote and illustrated several indigenous botanical books and here is her “recipe” for planting trees”, Marie

Dig a hole at least 1m square. It must not be round because the roots will tend to grow round inside the hole. In a square hole, the roots find the corners and grow outwards. Put a thick layer of broken bricks in the bottom. Cut a length of hosepipe and insert it between the bricks so that it doesn't get blocked with sand when filling the hole. The hosepipe should stick out of the hole when filled. Fill the hole with good soil and compost and plant the tree to the same level as it is growing in the plastic bag. Water well once a week through the hosepipe. The bricks hold their own weight in water and osmosis allows the water to rise slowly to the top and keep the plant moist.

Marie also says, “if anyone wants any info on indigenous plants, I have a huge library and a fair amount of knowledge.”

Thanks so much Marie, maybe I made a round hole for my tree, can't remember now, sorry, tree.

## Alien grass in an indigenous grassland

Kikuyu grass (*Pennisetum clandestinum*) is spreading on the farm. The **EMP** states that planting of kikuyu should not be encouraged on Letamo and **DEFINITELY NOT** near water ways. If planted, it is only allowed inside the fenced area and the owner will be responsible for the costs of eradication of kikuyu spreading outside the fenced area. I know a lot of people are throwing their

kikuyu grass clippings outside the fenced area – for the game to eat. This only serves to spread this alien invader even further throughout the farm. Fire stimulates kikuyu, so fires should be discouraged near any kikuyu infestation. Rather plant the hard-wearing indigenous grass, *Cynodon dactylon*, commonly known as Bermuda Grass or Kweek; it requires less work and water once established and is endemic on the farm. You can buy this grass in seed packets that will sow 3 square metres – available from Mayford Seeds approximately R11 a packet. I found some at Muldersdrift Spar.

**\*ARBOR WEEK – 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER**

Plant some indigenous trees this week!

ooOOoo

**ESKOM SHOCK AFTER GIRAFFE DEATH**

Eskom was this week ordered to pay, by a Phalaborwa court, nearly R15,000 in damages to owners of a Hoedspruit game farm after erecting unsuitable power lines on a farm that carried giraffe. Three years ago a giraffe on the farm was electrocuted by overhead lines erected on the farm which were not within Eskom's own environmental guidelines which state that they be at least 5.2m in height. These guidelines were drawn up at least six years before the giraffe's demise and Eskom had failed to apply its own policies.

**KRUGER PARK GUIDES CHIEF SUSPECTS IN RHINO POACHING**

Two dead rhinos riddled with bullets were found in KNP earlier this year. After a massive man-hunt involving helicopters and game guards, two suspects were taken into custody and both are KNP guides. They go back to court on 25<sup>th</sup> August.

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**FORUM HOMINI - EVENTS CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER**

**September**

Wed 6	Wine Tasting with Gourmet dinner <i>Saronsberg Estate</i>		R250pp incl wine	
Mon 11	Philip Jonker Weltevrede Launch event			
Wed 13	Epicurean dinner		R300pp	R120pp
Wed 20	French Gastronomic dinner	R220pp	R120pp	
Wed 27	Topical evening: Guest Speaker with dinner Artist: Paul du Toit	R220pp	R 75pp	

**October**

Wed 4	Wine Tasting with Gourmet dinner <i>Cloverfield Estate</i>	R250pp incl wine		
Wed 11	Epicurean dinner	R300pp	R120pp	
Wed 18	French Gastronomic dinner	R220pp	R120pp	
Wed 25	Topical evening: Guest Speaker with dinner	R220pp	R 75pp	

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**ADVERTISING**

Several people have asked me if they can advertise in this newsletter, so I am trying out from next month. There will be no charge – but please get your copy to me via email by the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month.

**Sunset Braai Area -**

Must be booked. This can be done by contacting the LE office.

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