

LETAMO WILDLIFE – JUNE 2006



FROM THE WALLOW

The one that got away!

Would you believe it – having just replaced our camera that was stolen at George airport a couple of months ago, I have been taking it everywhere with me – just in case. On Sunday the 5th March, I left it at home when I popped up to the shops. As I approached Steenbok Dam (where the hippos sometimes visit), I saw a humungous water monitor, likkewaan, leguaan *Varanus nilotica*, about to cross the road. I swear it is the biggest I have ever seen, even bigger than one that was captured in Midrand a while ago, because residents there were convinced there was a crocodile on the rampage when I was the Midrand SPCA inspector in the late 80's. That monitor lizard was measured at just under two metres and was considered to be an exceptional specimen. Letamo's monster measures much more....

He stopped right in front of my Landy to nibble upon migrating brown-veined white butterflies and was exactly at a 90 degree angle to me. He stood with his head to the edge of the road and the tip of his tail was marked by a rock in the road. I watched him for a full ten minutes – this was at midday – before he ambled off into the reeds – quite unconcerned! He has a kink at the end of his tail and appears to be quite tame. I measured the area where he was standing – 2.10 metres! These lizards are supposed to grow to 1.6 metres – so this one is a giant. Please let me know if any of you have had sightings of this very large beastie – best of all a good photo or two would be most welcome.

Marie McCrae, who is building at No 29, has a whole album of flora and fauna taken on Letamo and she will share with us in the coming months. Thanks, Marie – I see you have a lekker photo of eland with our house as a back-drop!

The picture below is of a rock monitor which has a much shorter tail than the water monitor and also has a stubby nose in comparison. The water monitor has a flattened tail, much like that of the crocodile, to aid it in swimming.

Fire season is upon us and Alex is busy burning firebreaks – but do you have any fire fighting equipment at hand? It is always a good idea to have fire beaters at the ready – outside your property so that helpers can easily find them to help stop a fire burning your house down. And to help stop a veld fire around your house – if a fire tears through Letamo we will have a very big feed bill for our animals until the rains come! I believe Alex makes them or you can get them at Heron Bridge Produce, Muldersdrift for R40 a beater. It is recommended, (I think it should be compulsory) that each household has at least two fire beaters easily accessible outside the house. Contact me if you are interested in getting some.

Please – feedback to this newsletter and your news, views and sightings are most welcome. The Letamo Home Owners Association wants us to all get involved in enjoying this special place!

Stay well,

Jill



RESIDENT'S LETTERS:

Congratulations on your very informative newsletter, especially the info on the grass. My house is coming on fast and I hope to be moving in within the next couple of months and I can't wait.

I am especially excited about the fox, that is very special.

Warm regards, **Marie McCrae (stand 29)**

DANGEROUS WEED ABOUNDS ON LETAMO!

Please read this – especially parents of teens and pre-teens!



Names: Common Thorn Apple/Downy Thorn Apple/Jimson Weed/Olieboom/Stinkblaar/Oliebos/Malpitte
Datura stramonium - belongs to the potato family *Solanaceae*

Wherever soil has been turned to make way for houses, electricity lines, plumbing, roads etc on the farm you will find this annual forb striking its way through. It is by nature a pioneer plant and quickly and aggressively occupies any disturbed land – and the seeds can stagger germination, ensuring that the weed is established for many years.

Its pods, leaves and roots are highly toxic to animals and humans, producing weird hallucinogenic effects – something many teenagers are quick to experiment with. Many youngsters in rural areas die from experimenting with this natural intoxicating drug. The plant was a known poison to the Romans and is now cultivated in Central Europe and South America for the production of atropine.

It has pale purple or white trumpet-shaped flowers that produce mean-looking spiky seed pods that scatter black seeds upon bursting open. These seeds are called “malpitte” because if you ingest them they make you crazy. Effective control is possible with herbicides, but you can also pull the plants up before they go to seed. The plants originally came from North America and were first observed in the Cape in 1714. They have been declared by SANBI as a Category 1 Weed and Invader and are not allowed to be grown in South Africa and must be removed. **If you see them pull them up and put them in the bin so that their seeds do not get into your children or back into the soil!**

ooOoo



Barbary Lion *Panthera leo leo* – the largest sub-species of lion in the world – roamed from Morocco to Egypt – now extinct in the wild – will this be the fate of African plains lions in ten years' time????

Sunday Times, February 26 2006

TIME TO TAKE ACTION TO SAVE AFRICA'S LION POPULATION

Africa's lions are in danger of becoming extinct.

New research shows that the continent's lions, with a population of about 30 000, will die out in the next ten years if nothing is done to save them.

The findings were released at the recent Eastern and Southern African Lion Strategy Conference held in Johannesburg this week. Its delegates included conservationists, wildlife organisations and representatives from several governments.

The study shows that Africa's lion population, estimated to be about 200 000 in the mid-1980s has dwindled as a result of conflict with humans and livestock, a loss of habitat due to economic development, and a virus.

Kate Nicholls, a member of Botswana's Lion Aid organisation and a world-renowned researcher, said that in the past 20 years "up to 50% of Africa's lions have died due to habitat loss and human-predator conflict".

Nicholls said that the lion lentivirus (LLV) – a close relative of feline immunodeficiency virus in cats and HIV in humans – has contributed to declining numbers.

Research indicates that the number of lions in Angola, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana has dropped sharply.

Among the four groups of lions identified as having a good chance of survival is a group in the Kruger National Park.

Nicholls' study of lions in the Okavango Delta has revealed that only 10 of 103 cubs born in the past six years have survived to adulthood.

"it is critical that Africa takes action to defend its wild lions. Lions play a crucial role in Africa's economy due to tourism and trophy hunting," said Nicholls. – *Charles Molele*

THE BARBARY LION



Kingdom	Animalia
Phylum	Chordata
Class	Mammalia
Order	Carnivora
Family	Felidea
Genus	Panthera
Species	Leo (subspecies l.leo)
Common Name	Lion

One would be familiar with the Barbary Lion if you were an avid follower of the old Roman Empire and the days of the great gladiators who fought entertaining battles in the coliseum for the masses of people who enjoyed the sight and thrill of man on man combat as well as man on lion combat.

For it was in fact the Barbary Lion which was used in such savage battles where there was only one winner... hopefully the lion.

Origin

It is questionable as to whether or not the Barbary lion is more closely related to the African or Asian lion in its evolutionary origins. While the answers are not known for sure, a study done in 1968 (one of the only studies done on the Barbary lion) did provide us with a theory.

The study showed that the Barbary, Cape, Asian and African lions all shared similar skull characteristics, however the very narrow postorbital bar (the caudal element of the skull found immediately behind the eye), existed only in the Barbary and Asian lions, showing that there may have been a closer relationship between the lion populations of northern most Africa and Asia.

It is also believed that the same belly fold (hidden under the mane) is shared by the Barbary and Asian lions.

Description

Second only in size to the Siberian tiger among the felines, the Barbary lion is the largest of all the lion species in the world. This massive size could be attributed to the large mane the Barbary lion possessed.

The mane, unlike the more common African lion, engulfed the head, shoulders, chest as well as running the full length of the abdomen, coming to an end between the hind legs.

The average weight of the males is between 240 – 280kg and a length of between 2.44 – 2.74 metres from the tip of the nose to tip of the tail, whilst the females weighed in at around 170 – 210kg and had an average length of between 2.13 – 2.44 metres.

The Barbary lions, like most lions, have a uniformly tawny coat and the shades of it may vary from light to dark, with the Barbary lion's mane usually developing a very dark almost black colour when maturity is reached.

Finally, the ears have black spots on the back, which stay black though out their lives unlike the females. Both male and females are born with black rosettes that cover their bodies which will fade with the age but are however still noticeable on closer inspection.

Reproduction

The males and females would come together in mating season, which was thought to be January. Plains lions have no set mating season and can therefore be found breeding throughout the year. The females start coming into oestrous around two years old, but generally don't conceive until 3 – 4 years, however the males (like most men), start showing an interest in the females at a very young age of between 24 – 30 months, but don't tend to produce cubs before the age of 3 but more often 4 years old.

The gestation period like most lion species, was 110 days after which 1 – 6 cubs were born, with 3 – 4 being most common. The cubs weigh approximately 1.5kg at birth and will thereafter continue to gain roughly 100g per day and their eyes open around the 6th day and they start to walk at around 13 days.

Population

It is believed that there are roughly 250 Barbary lions left in the world.

The last Barbary lion in the wild was believed to have been shot in Morocco in 1920.

Today Barbary lions only exist in captivity, with research showing that not all alleged captive Barbary lions are indeed true Barbary lions.

Final Word

It is through education that the numbers of Barbary lions and other lion species can be maintained and hopefully increased. Canned lion hunting has officially been banned, and there are more and more breeding programmes starting up to try ensure the survival of the species.

It goes further in hoping that schools and educational institutions will teach us the importance of nature and nature conservation.

Think about this... Everyone knows lions exist, but how many of us know anything about them?

Brendon Wecke (Stand 44)

(ed's note – Brendon is a part-time Big Cat Handler and passionate about lions and tigers. He will be providing us with some education on the subject of big cats in future issues. Although I must differ that canned hunting has officially been banned, not so as far as I know. Thanks, Brendon!)

Highly Rare (Probably Endangered) Two-Headed Kelp Gull - Walvis Bay, Namibia, February 2006!

I took this picture on the 17th of February and I thought it was quite amusing – it is actually two gulls, one behind the other, Jill.



Beat this! Here's a picture taken by Marie McCrae of one of 'our' fish eagles.

PUTSI FLY ON LETAMO!

At least one of our resident's dogs has had several putsi fly larvae removed from its tummy by a veterinarian in the last few weeks. The disease broke out in North West Province recently as reported below by SAPA.

A skin-worm sickness which has broken out in the Mafikeng area has been identified, the provincial health department said on Wednesday. The condition is Cutaneous Myiasis, a skin condition caused by *Cordylobia Anthropophaga* (tumbu fly, mango fly, putsi fly). The department said the fly was widely found in Africa, and dogs and rodents were the usual hosts. Humans were accidental hosts. "Although it is not usually found in the North West province, it is found in other parts of South

Africa such as Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal.

"It is related to the weather pattern and is common in the lowveld, in hot humid areas," said provincial health spokesperson Tebogo Lekgethwane.

The department reported on Tuesday that the sickness had hit several villages around Mafikeng. "People come to clinics complaining that their body is itching. Within three days small sores develop. A yellow spot then develops from each sore as it gets ripe. Once the sore is expressed a worm comes out of it." The female fly lays eggs on damp clothing or in damp soil. The larvae that emerge from the eggs penetrate the skin painlessly. A small pimple resembling a boil develops over about six days. Eventually the larvae is large enough for close examination to reveal small dark lines with pus in the centre.

The department said treatment consisted of covering the lesion with Vaseline or liquid paraffin which suffocated the larva.

Treatment should be left on for 30 minutes to an hour and then the larva should be pushed out via finger pressure.

It is said attempted removal by instruments may rupture the larva and cause severe inflammation.

Ironing all clothes will kill the eggs, but perhaps tumble-drying clothes would be safer if you have one. Keep dog's beds off the ground and their bedding clean and dry – and ironed!

Having lived in Zambia and Zimbabwe for many years, I have had the misfortune to have a putsi fly or two, but ironing clothes – even undies – kept the problem mainly under control. Let's hope that these putsi flies are controlled by a cold winter as they are really yucky – even though they don't actually do much harm – it's awful knowing you have a larva under your skin and having to wait until it has matured before you can effectively get rid of it!

KEEP ME INFORMED!

I only learnt about the putsi fly by chance. If you have any gogga problems or anything of interest, please don't forget to let me know so that I can keep resident's informed.

Hope you don't mind all the lion news – but we can hear them roaring at dawn and dusk from the Rhino and Lion Park next door! They even have Barbary Lions there – so go see!

Thanks, Jill

Sunset Braai Area

Gideon has asked me to remind everyone that this braai area has to be booked. This can be done by contacting the office on 011 976 9871.

Letamo Wildlife News is a private newsletter, edited and distributed on a voluntary basis and without cost to members of Letamo Game Farm or Letamo Home Owners Association and for those who may be interested in environmental issues.

Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the editor, or of The Letamo Home Owners Association. Whilst every care is taken in the preparation of this newsletter, no responsibility is accepted for errors.

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