

LETAMO WILDLIFE – SPRING 2006



FROM THE WALLOW

Well, September saw the sad demise of Australian self-styled “Wildlife Warrior”, Steve Irwin who was taken out by a sting ray. Many conservationists thought that Irwin was rather over-the-top in his approach to his work, but Irwin certainly got the message around the world that the world’s flora and fauna needs to be protected if we are going to pass it on to following generations. Instead of staying in the rather stuffy, holier-than-thou mould of traditional wildlife presenters – Irwin went out there headlong, full of enthusiasm and bravado, made loads of dollars (US), bought up land in Australia to turn into private protected nature reserves – and had loads of fun. We all thought that a “salty” would one day gobble him up, but Crikey, mate – he died doing what he loved most. RIP, Steve.

Right on cue, on 1st September, two lesser-striped swallows alighted on our fence – the first we’ve seen this season, spring is sprung and start looking out for many more migratory birds – and let us know about them! The European nightjars are back on the farm too.

Thanks to Lucille for the promised article on tick bite fever

Stay well,

Jill



(Photo – People for Wildlife Website)

LETAMO LETTERS AND TALES:

Sightings by shareholders...

- Additions to Bird List – Cape Vulture – seen near the quarry in early August – although sometime last year we saw about 20 of them circling over the hippo dam;
 - Emerald Cuckoo and Purple Heron – thanks to Ian Grant.
 - There is a Brown-Hooded Kingfisher presently on the farm near Site 25!
 - Several people have seen yellow mongooses, all at different locations on the farm, so it seems the Free Me release is not alone! Thanks to all who contributed.
 - A brown snake eagle has been seen around Steenbok Dam.
 - The black eagles were seen flying over Letamo in early November.
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THE CROCODILES ARE CRYING

His little girl explained it best...she said "The crocodiles are crying"
Their best mate's up in heaven now – the crocs up *there* are smiling!
And as sure as flowers, poems and cards and memories are piling
As sure as we'll continue with the trademarks of his spiel
Of all the tributes worthy – he was rough...but he was real
As sure as 'Crikey!' fills the sky
I think we'll miss ya Steve...goodbye

RUPERT McCALL 2006



Brown Hooded Kingfisher, photo Patricia Riekert 6.9.06

HUMAN TICK BITE FEVER

By: Dr Lucille Blumberg

Stand 11 Letamo and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases



Picture A – Eschar

Picture B - Rash

While Letamo is a wonderful place to live, some dangers for the intrepid hikers lurk in the bush. The ticks are becoming very active at this time and one of the commonest infectious disease problems in the area is **tick bite fever** with the brown and yellow dog ticks and the cattle ticks the usual culprits. Last summer there were a number of residents affected. While the majority of people affected will experience mild disease, some even asymptomatic infection, tick bite fever can cause severe illness and even death if treatment is delayed or incorrect. Some cases present atypically and may be misdiagnosed.

Cause: An unusual bacterium called a rickettsia is transmitted by a tick during a blood meal.

Illness: The time from bite to first symptom is 6-12 days. The initial early symptoms of severe headache, fever, and frequently, nightmares, is followed 3 – 5 days later by the rash. At the bite site there is a characteristic non painful black necrotic type lesion surrounded by red inflammation, called an eschar (picture A) and this is usually associated with painful regional lymphadenopathy. The bite may not be in an easily visible site so look between the toes, behind the knees, the groin and in the hair. The rash is only present in some patients and manifests typically as fairly discrete raised and flat red spots distributed on the trunk and limbs, classically involving the palms and soles (picture B). In older patients, and in severe disease, the rash may be haemorrhagic with red blood spots and bruising.

Diagnosis: The disease is confirmed by a specific blood test but this test can be negative in the first week of illness, so the diagnosis is generally made just by noting the typical signs and symptoms especially fever and the characteristic bite mark.

Treatment: doxycycline (a long acting tetracycline) is the treatment of choice, and a short course should even be considered in young children and pregnant women. Other antibiotics work less well and are not recommended.

Prognosis: generally very good and patients will respond within 48 hours. If they don't the diagnosis or the treatment is not correct! Ticks may transmit other diseases such as Congo fever but to date these have not been confirmed at Letamo. If treatment is delayed, tick bite fever may be complicated by multi-organ failure and bleeding and a small percentage of patients will die.

Prevention : long pants and long socks when walking; application of DEET containing products (e.g. Peaceful Sleep or Tabard Cream) to exposed areas, 'de-ticking' after bush adventuring by thorough examination of body especially the hidden areas mentioned above. The larval ticks are very small, just as dangerous as the adults and often difficult to detect. Heat and chemicals are not effective in removing ticks. Best to use forceps (tweezers), and grasp as near as possible to the point of attachment to the victim and using a linear rather than a twisting motion, pull gently! Tick collars may be preferred by some!

SEWAGE LAW UPDATE

(This is an extract from The Gauteng Smallholder, written by Pete Bower. For the full transcript, please email me and I will send it to you.)

Increased concern for what sewage does to the earth's groundwater has prompted a change of view by the Dept of Water Affairs & Forestry (Dwaf) about the efficacy and suitability of the conventional septic tank/soak-away system found on most smallholdings and farms.

As a result, local authorities throughout the country are changing their rules as to what systems may be installed to handle sewage in areas not served by municipal lines.

In most cases the municipal authorities will allow the continued use of septic tanks and soak-aways on existing residential properties. In other words, if your septic tank is functioning properly, albeit with periodic cleaning, and the size and nature of your household is unchanging, you will not be required ~ in the immediate future at least ~ to install a new-technology system. However, any new developments, and in many cases even new houses built on existing properties, must be equipped with ~ either ~ a more sophisticated system which renders the effluent less harmful to the environment, or a lined conservation tank into which the sewage is discharged and out of which it is periodically pumped by a "honey sucker" for disposal into a municipal system.

The same applies if the use of a property changes, for example if a residential property is changed into a guesthouse.

A number of systems are available for use on plots and farms which work on the sewage to render it harmless in the environment, while a number more claim to do so but in fact don't, or do so only partially.

How do they work? In some cases the miniature plants are highly mechanical, using tanks, pumps and aerators to agitate the sewage and settle out the solids, as well as filtration and bacterial processes to produce clear effluent which can be used for irrigation. Such systems are complex and expensive to install and require constant monitoring in the event of power failures etc. Moreover, their desirable components such as pumps, switchgear etc make them prone to vandalism and theft and therefore unsuited to use in rough rural settings.

Another system, simply uses a series of six underground consecutive chambers, enhanced septic tank bacteriology, aeration and re-activated sludge to achieve a discharge that is clear, odour-free and conforms to Dwaf standards for water not purified for human consumption but suitable for use in irrigation...

FALLOW DEER *Cervus dama* - THE LETAMO GAME FARM DILEMMA

Height at shoulder

Males: 90 - 95cm

Females: Slightly smaller

Weight: Up to 110 kgs (large males)

Sexual dimorphism: Males carry antlers which are shed during November and regrown to the velvet stage by February. Females do not carry antlers

Gestation – 8 months – twins and even triplets sometimes occur.



It is not recorded who first brought Fallow Deer to South Africa, but they were kept at Newlands House, Cape Town when it was sold by the Government in 1869. Cecil John Rhodes has been incorrectly attributed with the first introduction, but his importation of Fallow Deer was as late as 1897. Since then Fallow Deer have been introduced on game farms throughout the sub-region as they thrive in most conditions, even in the Karoo. They are a popular hunting trophy animal and provide good meat.

Fallow Deer are able to adapt to just about any diet, but in their native Europe, they are predominantly browsers. In this region they will graze but also eat leaves, herbs, nuts, berries and tree bark. Therefore, they are in direct competition with the Springbok, Impala and Eland and with Kudu on Letamo Game Farm.

These deer are predominantly nocturnal (making them difficult to capture) and the females can conceive in their second year. They are not dependant on water and because of their adaptability, Fallow Deer have become feral in South Africa, pushing indigenous species out, much like the exotic Indian Myna or Feral Pigeon of the bird world.

When Letamo Estates bought the game farm it was already known that the Fallow Deer had to be removed as it is an alien species in a World Heritage Site that threatens the bio-diversity and eco systems of the Cradle of Humankind.

Ever since board minutes were first recorded, it has been the intention to try to capture the deer and to sell them to game farmers, rather than to cull the Fallow Deer. On 24th July 2003 it was decided to prepare a capture area for + - 80 deer. I could find no record of whether any were captured. In October 2004 a letter was received requesting that the deer be removed within 12 months, followed shortly by a letter requesting that all non-indigenous game be removed within 12 months. The Game Count recorded as at 31st January 2005 stated that there were 80 Fallow Deer on the property.

At the Board Meeting held on the 3rd of September 2005, it was stated that should GDACE inspect the game farm it would be liable for penalties if the Fallow Deer had not been removed. It was decided in that meeting to cull the deer at night using spotlights and to offer the carcasses to shareholders at a price. This was communicated to the shareholders and many were very unhappy about killing the deer, so the plan was put on hold. Manie said that "if we could show Gauteng Provincial that we have tried to take them off firstly through selling and that our last resort was culling, it should be sufficient, but we need to put a plan in place."

On the 1st October, 2005 it was decided to get Hooves and Horns Game Capture to see if they can capture the Fallow Deer. Extracts from Exemption Permit from Gauteng Provincial Permits. Conditions of Permit P3 No. 0443, Point 7, dated 21.10.2004:

"If any exotic game species do occur on the property the owner/holder of this permit is responsible to remove such exotic species within a year from the date of this permit."

"Failure to comply with any of the conditions of this permit may lead to the withdrawal of this permit."

The permit, which may be viewed at the LE offices, also specifies what game we are allowed to keep on the farm.

On the 11th of February 2006, the problem of the Fallow Deer was again discussed and two passive capture bomas were subsequently erected. Three Fallow Deer were caught, but one escaped during loading onto the truck.

All attempts to capture the deer have been disappointingly unsuccessful. Culling appears inevitable.



Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius*

The Afrikaans name for this bird, Piet my vrou, describes the call of the male bird. Some English speakers translate its call as "quid pro quo", but however you choose to describe the call, this bird can call on-stop for 24 hours a day – doesn't the darn thing ever eat or sleep?

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.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

Children's Christmas Party – Sunday, 26th November at 15h00

*** Behind the chapel of Letamo Town ***

*** RSVP: Juanita (073 407 4869) or Ilze (083 200 5337) ***

ADVERTISING

After being asked to insert adverts into the newsletter – nobody has been forthcoming! If you do want to advertise, please let me have copy by the 15th of the month – thanks. So, I have decided to put in my own advert to get you started.

Jill Masterton Communications – 082 457 6994

- Drafting and distribution of articles, features, press releases and advertorials.
- In-house newsletters, brochures and ad packs.
- Executing effective communications campaigns to enhance company, product or services. This package includes conceptualisation and research, finding different news angles, media liaison (print, radio and television) and drafting and distribution of promotional material.
- Promoting safaris and tourist activities in the SADC region.
- Clients include the marketing arm of SABC (Radio and Television), NOSA, Radio Safari, Cross Colours Design and International Mounted Games Association.

Sunset Braai Area –

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

Rain recorded on Site 8 – August 28.6mm; September 2mm; October 31mm; November 79.9mm.



Doggie talking to eland bull – only on Letamo!

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