

Mark

Greetings N'tsirians

I hope this finds everyone embraced by 2018 goodness & blessings. Our Christmas & New Year events went down well, it was a great time to be on the reserve. Plenty fun was had, big thanks to my team for putting shoulder to the plough, some days the heat ventured into the deadly zone, thank heavens we got through. The staff family lunch was a very enjoyable occasion, many thanks to those who did attend (more next time please, bring the kids too) & Ema-Jean for the game-drives!! We had a taxi for the day, brought in staff family members for what turned out to be a feast, then back home safely after. Thanks Gail, #23, for the curtains for our staff village, expect many hugs when you make it back here, looking grandiose!! Ethel's craft gin & wine tasting number was a hit, Safari Wines did a splendid function, we'll have to repeat with a different flair sometime. The one thing we never did, was the member sundowner function, no worries, stock will be held till Easter, we'll have a "op-skop" then. Those who attended the Ground-Hornbill presentation would be ever so more wiser on that topic. Fantastic, Kyle's enthusiasm is infectious.



We've been extremely busy on the reserve, various projects swallowing time at rates which are shocking. There's a constant juggle of chore priorities, all weather dependant, ranging from bush-thinning, road-works, alien vegetation control, outstanding maintenance issues, reserve clean-up, to mention but a few. At present, very little can be done on the road network, it's just too dry & hot. Ground surface temps often reach upper 50's, even got to 62 C !!! That day the tar road melted !!! Many thanks to members for informing me immediately of issues on the reserve, it makes addressing those problems so much more efficient. Trees over roads, holes in road dug by elly, etc. Ivo, #R15, let me know of a collapsing old septic tank system opposite Jabula Picnic Spot. That ended up being a major reserve clean-up of that area, as I had to come up with what turned out to be 6 cubes of fill, a rather large volume. Anyway, all sorted pronto, no more hazards there. Interesting, there's an old cattle dipping tank in that area, plenty sign of related activities & infrastructure along many of the drainage lines. Now most of those zones are quite prone to erosion, if only the early pioneers had consulting ecologists & reserve managers ☺☺☺ It's imperative to turn the negatives into positives, so rubble, if moved, must go into gabions or other stabilising structures.

6 years ago, 20th Jan 2012, Ntsiri looked completely different, Ntsiri River was flowing 8m deep (much higher in the bends) after cyclone Dando gave this region a severe "klap". Today, the dryness is alarming, so many promises & possibilities of rain reaching us, even warnings for severe destructive rain ! This is a radical change, living here, one can most certainly identify & empathise with the Cape area. All the chatter about water being the cause for the next global wars most certainly has a

different slant for residents when this controls/regulates your daily operational agenda. My heart bleeds for our grazers, grass stocks dwindle daily.

Most unfortunately our water matters looking very bleak for now. What we have found whilst looking for causes of water losses from our reticulation system, some distinctly noticeable, others almost an enigma, water just vanishes !! Some members forget to turn off water stop cocks (when departing) either at all, or not properly. Please please do so, as tracking down a water loss that emanates from a leaking toilet inside a “locked-up” unit is so terribly time wasting. Report ALL leaks immediately please. If things continue in the present rut, were heading for very tough times, we still need our aquifers to be topped up. Our aquifers, also known as dykes, are akin to rock sponges, not underground lakes or rivers, all recharge is from rain. Theoretical recharge values vary between 0,1 & 0,3% of total annual rainfall. Doesn’t give us fantastic numbers for the past 3,5 years or for what’s left of this “wet” season. Interestingly & alarmingly, the less ground-surface cover you have, the greater the run-off, so less “soaking-in”, another “catch-22” !



Rhino poaching in the area has taken a smack recently. One of the kingpins & a foot-soldier were arrested last week, plus a .375 Calibre rifle & a bunch of rounds. Their working stash spot was just alongside the bridge we all drive over when entering or exiting Hdspt !!! K-9 units Annie got some mouthfuls of poacher, let’s hope that dish is gotten more frequently, congrats & well done to all concerned.

Game sightings have been off the charts, how blessed we have been. Please members, can you share with me any photos which I can use for establishing correct identities of specific animals, you will be given all credits if used (never for personal gain) for any objective. High resolution pics of spot patterns, whisker spots, are of great ID value. If too large to send, please bring on a portable flash disc jobby on your next visit. My Leopards of Ntsiri file is starting to look good, yet to get the Lion File going, and the Hyena & Wild-dog Files. Some very amazing sightings reported too. Amongst others, aardvark, eland, tiny leopard cub, also tiny lion cubs. Please be aware of the following, young lambs, calves, cubs or pups that are under 3 months of age, can be totally traumatised by noisy fume gorging game viewers with blazing searchlights & popping flashes !! Paints quite a picture, but please take note, these future generations of our gene-pools need extra TLC, please leave them be, don’t put any pressure, remove the fumes, noise & extreme interference (from a baby’s perspective, also the mother) from them till at least 3 months old. Some leopardess with cub sightings had more than 6 vehicles attending, all driving to & fro. I think in retrospect, everyone will agree, too much for a baby, I’d say, quite stressful for any animal, be sensitive please.

Congrats to the many tree-huggers of Ntsiri, some great efforts put in. I refer to the elephant deterrent project, the wire-netting of mainly knob-thorns & black monkey-thorns (DO NOT give that name to Julius !!). Greatest numbers wire-netted still goes to Team Roos, #53, so far have done

73!!! I've also commenced a project, using creosote, placed in glass jars, secured to a tree of any size, so even young knob-thorns without bare stems. I very unashamedly have a soft-spot for Marula trees (*Sclerocarya birrea*), but don't pass Cassias, vulnerable Leadwoods, Schotias, also large Mopani's. I use recycled glass jars, please save any jam, pickle or other glass jars for the project. When we ran out of those, which I've been collecting/hoarding for months, I cut off beer & other bottles necks which also works very well. All materials for the project are from our recycling efforts, expenses are creosote (about 75ml) & nails (5) per tree. Thanks Peter Erlank for producing so many of the components for this project, you're a gem Sir.

I discovered Queen-of-the-night, *Cereus jamacaru*, growing on Colmos area, seen it there in the distance, always assumed Euphorbia, but they now flowering, producing large inflorescences, not the cyathia (tiny Euphorbia "flowers"). I checked with the fundis, it's a noxious weed !! I'll TreeMap & eradicate, plus a bunch of Opuntias (prickly pear). The Mexican poppy (*Argemone mexicana*), has re-appeared in force post the 22mm rain we had what seems like ages ago, that after I had removed many thousands in the Sleeping Platform area, now looking like a poppy nursery ! #09 crossing the same. Smelters bush (*Flaveria bidentis*) also a weed, now becoming common, it handles the sporadic rain & in-between dry spells very well. Our resident Weed Scientist, Lesley #16, has found Famine weed, (*Parthenium hysterophorus*), a registered noxious weed growing in front of their unit in the Ntsiri River, quite an unpleasant number, contains some highly irritating colloids. They all look like greenery & healthy, but have no feed value to our fauna. Whilst all these are in their active growing phases, we should be removing. Work party, any takers ?



Queen-of-the-night, *Cereus jamacaru*

I'm certain everyone got Don's mail re the departure of Dave & Adel from Ntsiri. We wish them all the best, & must be pro-active for what lies ahead for Ntsiri.

Another very sad event, the Kleu family #29, and Ntsiri, lost Barry. Some members would have known him as "Snowy", what a humble gentleman, naturalist of epic proportions, a stand-out exemplary man. He so loved the Bushes in all its most minute detail. I enjoyed his presence & outlook so much, we will miss him deeply. Our very best wishes to Anne & family.

Malaria cases continue to pop up, so continue to take preventative measures. There have been plenty cases this season.

A thought at the end. We can throw money at luxuries, but common sense & essentials, have no price tag. Let's not run low on water, or the other ☺

God bless you all, please pray for rain that will top up our aquifers & provide sufficient grass for our precious game, we just received a few drops, of course S of Kings Camp got a good dosing !!!

Best

Mark