



U M B A B A T

PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE
PRIVAAT NATUURRESERVAAT

Warden Report – Bryan Havemann

September 2019

Introduction

We have officially entered spring on the 1st of September and after the very dry winter period, there is a glimmer of hope that the rains are imminent before the end of the year. The clear evidence that the season is changing are the splashes of yellow flowers from the *Cassia abbreviate* Sjambok Pod (See photo in Annexure A) and many of the *Acacia nigrescens* Knob Thorns which started flowering early in August, still have their cream flower clusters with the very characteristic sweet smells and the hay fever consequences for humans. There were some uncomfortably hot days and it was also a very windy month. I saw a large 3,5-meter black mamba slithering through the Mopani trees which were devoid of leaves and the grey bark was the same colour as the gun-metal grey of the mamba, perfectly camouflaged as it searched for an unsuspecting tree squirrel. The birds mobbing it and squawking out their alarm calls however drew too much unwanted attention. The presence of reptiles on the move again is also a sign of the changing season.

UPNR Management Plan

During September contact was made with Dr Mike Peel and Greg Martindale to look at taking the updating of the Umbabat Management Plan forward. It was agreed that we would have a dedicated two-day workshop with the managers of the share blocks, UWCA and Motswari. The purpose will be to help align the appendix's that were handed out to the managers to help align their respective, current and historical activities with the new management plan going forward. The biggest challenge is trying to find a time that suits all the managers where we can be together for a two-day period and this will happen in the latter part of next month.

Umbabat Security& Related Issues

There has been a concerted effort to implement better access control at the Enkhulu Gate. The implementation however has been difficult as the Share Blocks and their respective challenges were not really considered when this new access system was first muted. The system is far easier to roll out in our neighbouring reserves i.e. Klaserie and Timbavati because of the larger landowner farms and the numerous commercial operations like lodges where it is far easier to track and load guests which are finite and there is usually a long lead in time. Despite a workshop that was held with the Control Gate Company representatives and the Service Provider, the nitty gritty of the share blocks and their members is not fully understood. I also had meetings with the new Ntsiri Chairman who is also the CGC Chair, to highlight some of the issues being brought to me by the Umbabat entities. Hopefully this will be resolved soon. The system will need to address the security concerns and help streamline the entry and exit from the reserves.

The Noctuum Security team that is still contracted to do all the security for Umbabat are still doing a good job in securing the integrity of our reserve. One of the Noctuum directors, Leon Ven Vuuren has left the organisation. David Jeffree the current manager is working well with the field rangers and he is very good at keeping the warden informed. He went on his two weeks break in September and Leon Jordaan came in as relief manager. Foot patrols were done daily by the field rangers. One team on the Western border of the reserve and the other in the North Eastern Corner of the reserve responsible for the Northern and Eastern borders. The teams were briefed daily and deployment duration was 4 days in the field, before being rotated with another team. The estimated distances patrolled per team were as follows:

Team	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Total kms patrolled
N2	72	88	54	60	274
N3	43	44	39	35	161
Total	115	132	93	95	435

The new Toyota Hilux's have made a massive difference to the effectiveness of the patrols due to their reliability. The new Toyota Hilux Single Cab was sent for its 10 000 km service at Lydenburg Toyota in the last week of this month. The Double Cab will be due for its 30 000 km service mid-October. The Mitsubishi Colt bakkie had its engine-block head skimmed and the engine serviced by Anthony at Ntsiri workshop. This vehicle is there as a backup now and is used when the other vehicles are not available such as when they are taken for a service. The total kilometres done by all 3 vehicles for September 2019 was 6164 km.

PROPOSED CITRUS DEVELOPMENT – located just outside APNR Reserves:

Umbabat sent in comments along with other reserves during the appeal process where the proposed citrus development is being opposed on the land just outside of Enkhulu Gate on the northern side of the Argyle tar road. The main objection is the extraction of water from the Klaserie River which only has a small reserve and could adversely affect all activities down river, not the least of which is the supplementing of water into the Olifants River system. The likelihood of the KNP expansion plan Westwards of the APNR may be frustrated by an approval of the proposed citrus development.

Ecological, research, monitoring and habitat management

Rainfall measured in September was 11 mm from a slow, soft shower after a front had moved through. Helped to settle the dust. Temperatures of 44 Degrees Celsius (unofficial) was recorded this month in a vehicle parked in the shade. Many of the very hot days where there was a berg wind blowing i.e. NW for most of the day it would turn late afternoon into a strong SE wind with a substantial temperature drop.

Elephants Alive whom are continuing with the elephant research, have been monitoring the condition of Matambu the collard elephant bull that had the veterinary intervention to clean out the tusk wounds inflicted by a younger bull. He also only has about 20% vision in one eye and the other is completely blind. There was a concern about his condition and if further supplementation should be considered, however after tracking him in Timbavati he was found to be doing well and a comparison on the day with Classic, another collard elephant bull, it was clear that at this time of year when there is not an abundance of food, that all the big bulls lose condition. Subsequent follow ups have shown that Matambu is now urinating properly and the wound on his back is healing up nicely. See photos in Annexure A.

An adult male lion with an injured hind leg was reported on Ingwelala. After investigating, we were able to photograph this lion and it transpired that the wound on the right hind leg was most likely caused by a buffalo horn. The leg looked like it was dislocated or broken but because it was a natural injury and this male was associated with other lions, management decision was taken to let nature take its course. All subsequent sightings of this lion were investigated and although this lion was still linked to a pride and had the occasional meal his overall condition had deteriorated substantially at the end of the month. The vet was on standby to dart and assess its condition with the endorsement of MTPA and Umbabat Management - however the lion moved and despite attempts to locate it, the lion remained elusive and was not located before the end of the month. A dead hippo was spotted from the helicopter and this lion was seen in the vicinity, so he was able to get a meal. See photos of this injured lion in Annexure A.

A hooded vulture was seen feeding on the hippo carcass with ID tags (See photo in Annexure A). This ID number was reported to Dr Lindy Thomson who is doing the vulture research. This helps determine movements in the lowveld, in the Greater Kruger Area.

There were also numerous sightings of the wild dogs this September, but the sightings diminished when the lions moved in; direct competition and a danger to their pups.

The Umbabat Annual Aerial Helicopter Census was done once Thornybush NR and Timbavati PNR had finished their side. Due to adverse weather conditions and a technical issue with the helicopter the count was delayed for two days on Timbavati which had a knock-on effect. The day of the Umbabat count we had near perfect weather conditions and the team of pilot Mike Pingo, recorder Dr Mike Peel, first observer John Llewellyn and myself as second observer (see photo in Annexure A), flew three full sessions and covered the whole of the Umbabat including the independents properties.

The following table 1, depicts the Umbabat aerial count numbers for 2019 with the comparison with the previous two years counts:

Table 1:

UMBABAT PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE HELICOPTER ANNUAL AERIAL CENSUS			
SPECIES/YEAR	2017	2018	2019
Baboon Troops	1	0	3
Blue Wildebeest	6	4	5
Buffalo	272	189	529
Bushbuck	0	0	0
Duiker	6	4	5
Elephant	141	351	159
Giraffe	15	31	62
Sharpe's Grysbok	3	11	1
Ground Hornbill	26	27	16
Hippo	5	7	12
Hyena	1	9	3
Impala	2558	2171	2180
Jackal (Black-backed)	0	0	0
Kudu	153	99	143
Leopard	3	1	3
Lion	0	7	5
Nyala	15	15	1
White Rhino	0	0	0
Steenbok	21	21	17
Vulture Nests	1	0	0
Warthog	38	38	43
Waterbuck	1	13	0
Zebra	72	82	108
Honey badger	0	0	0
Ostrich	0	0	0
Raptors nest	3	4	2

During the helicopter census, predators are very difficult to spot from the air. The five lions that were seen from the air were purely incidental sightings. Annually the Umbabat has a dedicated call up at specific sites (usually October) which help to give a better indication of lion population numbers. Other predators like hyenas, wild dogs, leopard etc. are also not easily seen and sightings are also incidental from the air and other methods such as the call up will also draw in these other predators where more accurate population trends can be ascertained. A scientifically motivated camera trap survey is proposed over the whole reserve, along with citizen scientist sighting reports from the Umbabat members, which will go a long way get a better idea of the total predator population on the Umbabat reserve. There is not much known about the meso-predators such as blacked-backed and side-striped jackal, caracal, serval, honey badgers, African Wild Cat etc. and this is also a potential avenue for further research to understand what meso-predator population numbers we have.

The Klaserie PNR was counted after the Umbabat. The Balule PNR opted not to use this helicopter for their census this year but did use the fixed wing to take photos of the larger buffalo herds with the help of Dr Wynand Uys.

Dr Wynand Uys was called in to take high resolution photos of the two buffalo herds seen on the Umbabat as well as other APNR reserves, in order to have an accurate count and determine the sex and age composition. It was good that he also did the other reserves in the APNR and the APNR map below (Figure 1) shows the broad distribution, with a comparison with the previous year’s count. Wynand said: “The individual APNR reserves have seen a substantial change in buffalo numbers between Sept 2018 and Sept 2019. I think a broader view of the numbers might be helpful i.e. If we look at the numbers in all the APNR reserves combined, the change is less dramatic. Keep in mind that I only worked with buffalo herds that I was called out for, so there are probably several smaller herds that are not considered in this report. In Balule we counted all herds, even the small ones. For the comparison, I’m only using herds of more than 30 buffalo. In the following APNR map, you’ll see that the total number of herds, the average herd size and hence the total number of buffalo in the APNR have hardly changed between Sept 2018 and Sept 2019. This does not necessarily mean that the population is stable. Remember that the APNR, as big as is, is still a relatively small window through which we see the greater population. We know from experience that the distribution of buffalo is in constant flux. If a single herd of 800 walks in or out the area the numbers might tempt some to draw improper conclusions. Similarly, no change in numbers is also not very meaningful.”

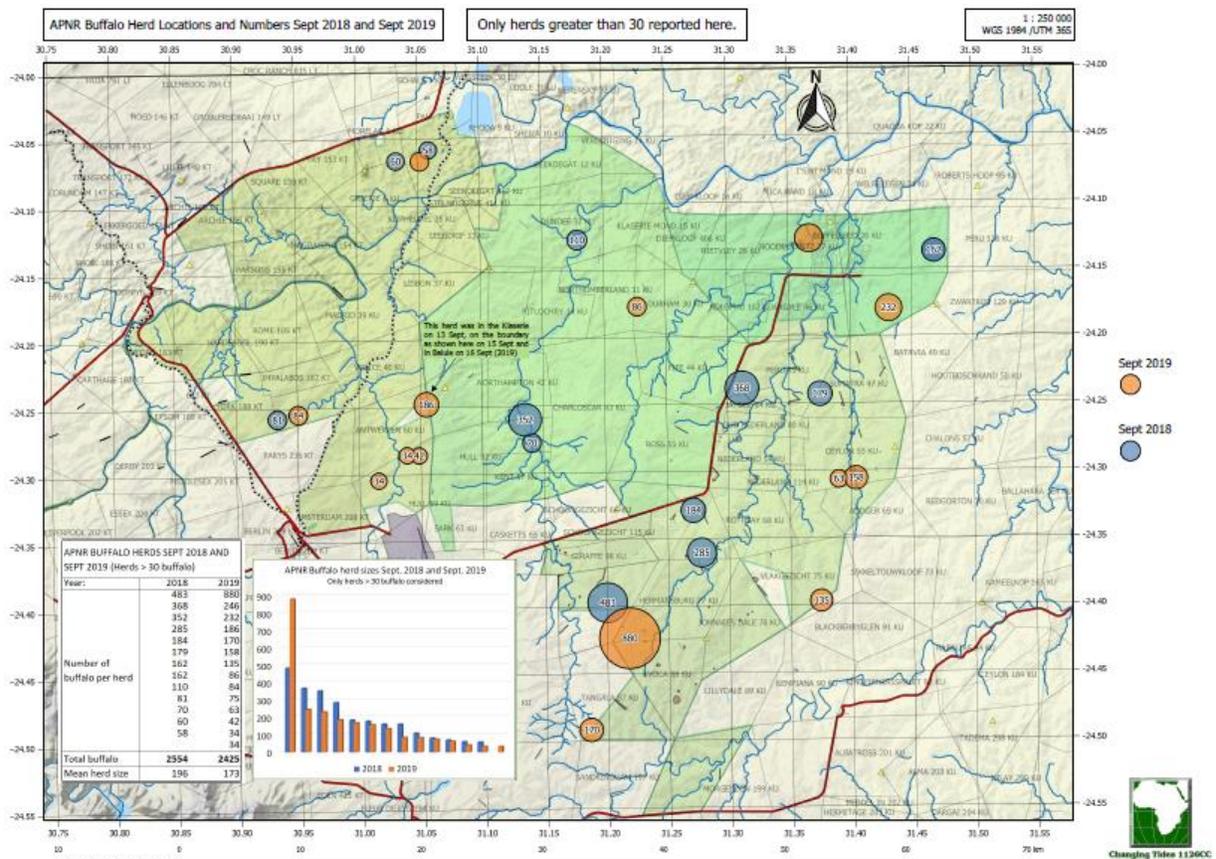


Figure 1: APNR Map with buffalo herd numbers <30 for 2018 and 2019

Sustainable Utilisation and Problem Animal Control

The MTPA called a meeting with APNR members and the KNP with their legal representatives where the impala permits requested by the **independent entities** (i.e. Paterson, de Luca and Luttig Trust) were discussed. Currently the Umbabat is not mandated to apply for these permits through the NIPAS system because a prerequisite was being part of the cooperative agreement and KNP as a direct neighbour feel that the requirements have not been met as requested from every entity applying for any form of off-takes. While the legal minds will deliberate, we will continue to foster good neighbour relationships and look at co-management or stewardship agreement possibilities to try move this forward.

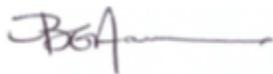
A post-hunt off-takes meeting was held in September at the Timbavati HQ. This meeting was attended by the respective wardens of the APNR, the reserve hunting reps, provincial authorities (LEDET & MTPA) and the national authority (SANParks represented by KNP). The purpose of this meeting is to hold each reserve accountable and to record the level of compliance according to the Greater Kruger Hunting Protocol. Each hunt is discussed in detail and a compliance score given. I'm happy to report that the Umbabat hunts were all fully compliant with the Greater Kruger Hunting Protocol and the Provincial legislation.

I attended a meeting with all the stakeholders at K2C offices where we discussed the envisaged wildlife economy and associated initiatives which will be based on the development of a game meat and associated products market for the Greater Kruger Area. This is being looked at for the KNP abattoir near Skukuza, Timbavati abattoir, Klaserie abattoir and looking at mobile abattoirs that can be rolled out to other areas. One of the key limitations are the state veterinary restrictions in terms of slaughtering, but also the red line limitations in terms of distribution. Politically we need to consider beneficiation as it is entrenched in NEMPAA and this is a sustainable resource that if managed correctly, can offer viable solutions.

Because of the dry condition's elephant bulls have starting raiding camps again. Ingwelala once again seems to be bearing the brunt of this unwanted attention despite them trying to mitigate and put in preventative measures. Lots of infrastructure damage! Ntsiri also has reported that vervet monkeys are becoming more of a problem at the Ntsiri HQ and the staff quarters and solutions to the problem are being sort in consultation with the Mpumalanga conservation authorities.

Thank you for taking the time to read the September 2019 monthly warden report.

Kindest regards



Bryan Havemann

Umbabat Private Nature Reserve Warden

Annexure A: Photographs

	
<p>Umbabat Census Team 2019, Mike Pingo, Dr Mike Peel, Bryan Havemann & John Llewellyn</p>	<p>Dead hippo first seen from the helicopter with hooded vulture with ID tags feeding on carcass</p>
	
<p>Five lions seen from the air on Jabula Farm</p>	<p>Ground hornbill flying as seen from above</p>
	
<p>Journey of giraffe with shadows</p>	<p>Buffalo breeding herd photographed by fixed wing</p>



Collard elephant bull called "Proud" losing condition at the end of winter



Leopard female seen from the air



Male lion with injured right hind leg when first reported



Same male lion condition after more than 3 weeks



Good sightings of wild dogs on the reserve



Sjambok Pod with yellow flowers and green leaves



Vet Dr Ben Muller checking Matambu's eyes



Matambu the collared bull's first vet intervention



July 2019 photo of Matambu with a loss of condition



Recent photo of Matambu's body condition, doing much better



Highest temperature recorded for the month



Helicopter shadow while passing over elephants during the aerial census