

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER

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Dear clients,

Just in time before the month is over! In this newsletter, you can learn about the fascinating caracal ears, which function like little build-in satellite dishes! We also provide a summary on body condition in antelopes, including how to assess their condition, and steps to improve it. Lastly, we invite veterinarians, nurses, animal technicians etc. to join us and Worldwide Vets for a dehorning mission next year!

Kind regards, the Wildlife Vets Namibia team.

NATURE'S BUILD IN SATELLITE-DISH: THE CARACAL EAR!

The caracal (Afr. rooikat) is a feline not often seen, they are mostly nocturnal (active during the night) and they enjoy a secret lifestyle! The caracal is a medium-sized cat that weighs around 8-19 kg.

The caracal has several fascinating traits. They have a short tail, they can jump almost 3m up in the air to catch birds, and they have a very impressive set of canines. Probably the most striking feature are their ears!

The ears of a caracal are large and incredibly sensitive. Each ear is equipped with 20 muscles that allow the ears to move and tilt independently. To compare, humans only have 6! The large satellite-dish ears capture any sound, and direct the sound into the ear canal. The ear canals are longer than that of dogs, and thus more sensitive to sounds.

On top of the caracal's ear, are +/- 4.5 cm long black tufts. Why they have these tufts is not exactly known. One theory is that the tufts break up the outline of the caracal's head, helping to keep flies out of the ear, others say it helps with camouflage in the tall grass. Another theory is that the tufts help to direct sounds into the ears.

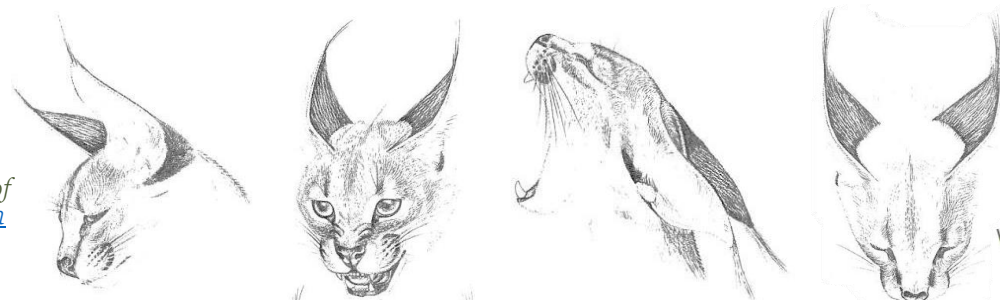
The most widely accepted theory is however that they use it as a means of communication. It has been observed that they interact with one another by moving their heads side to side, causing the tufts on their ears to flicker rapidly.

Due to the tufts on the ears, caracals are often confused with the lynx. Lynxes however live in America, Europe and Asia, and have spots on their coat, while caracals have a near-uniform reddish or sandy coat. Not surprisingly though, the caracal is sometimes called 'desert lynx'.

Have a look at [this video](#) from the Smithsonian Channel on YouTube, in where you can see a caracal hunting birds (0:26 – 3:23).



This caracal was not very happy about his vaccination! As per Namibian law, captive felines must get annual vaccinations. Feel free to contact us for vaccination strategies on your farm © M. Bijsterbosch



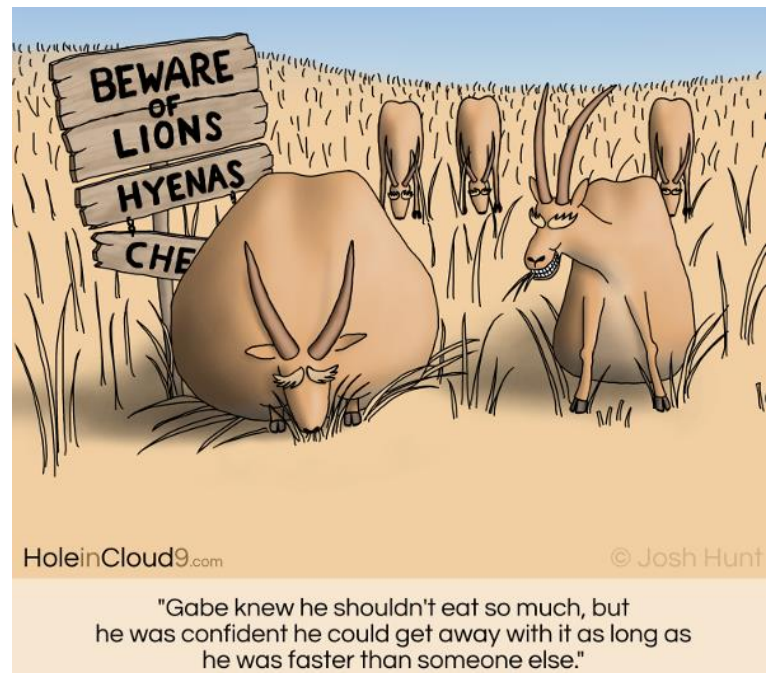
Some facial expressions of the caracal © J. Kingdon

BODY CONDITION IN ANTELOPE

Assessing the body condition of your animals is essential, as it offers valuable insights into their overall health. Both underweight and overweight animals are at risk of various health issues and tend to have lower reproduction rates. Given the current drought in Namibia, maintaining animals in good condition is particularly challenging. This article, which is a summary of our online article '[Body Condition in Antelope](#)' aims to explain how to assess the body condition score of antelopes, and gives some tips on how to improve the antelope's condition.

There are different causes why animals can have a poor body condition:

- 🐾 Insufficient nutrient intake
 - Primary starvation (e.g. in a drought)
 - Poor food quality (unpalatable or poorly digestible food)
- 🐾 Nutritional demands exceed food intake
 - Pregnant or lactating animals
 - Males fending off competitors during the breeding season
- 🐾 Inability to eat
 - Bad teeth, lesions in the mouth/jaw
 - Competition around feeding areas, the submissive animals don't get a chance to eat
- 🐾 Diseases
 - Can reduce appetite
 - Can lead to a loss of nutrients (worms, diarrhoea)



It is thus important to take note when antelopes lose condition. It could very well be due to the current drought and insufficient food, but it could also be a first sign of disease. One way of keeping track is by using a 'Body Condition Score System'. Several of these systems are used in domestic animals, and work on a numbering system. The lowest number is usually for animals in very poor condition, and the highest number for fat animals. For valuable animals, regularly taking comparative photos is a good practice, providing a permanent record of their overall condition trends. This helps spot and monitor early and minor changes in body condition.

When working with wildlife, observing animals often happens from a distance, and the opportunity to watch them for extended periods is rare before they vanish into the bush. To simplify this, we use a straightforward 4-scale system: 1 indicates very poor condition, 2 is poor, 3 is ideal, and 4 is fat.

For more information and photos of these condition scores, have a look at our '[Body Condition in Antelope](#)' article.

What body regions to assess?

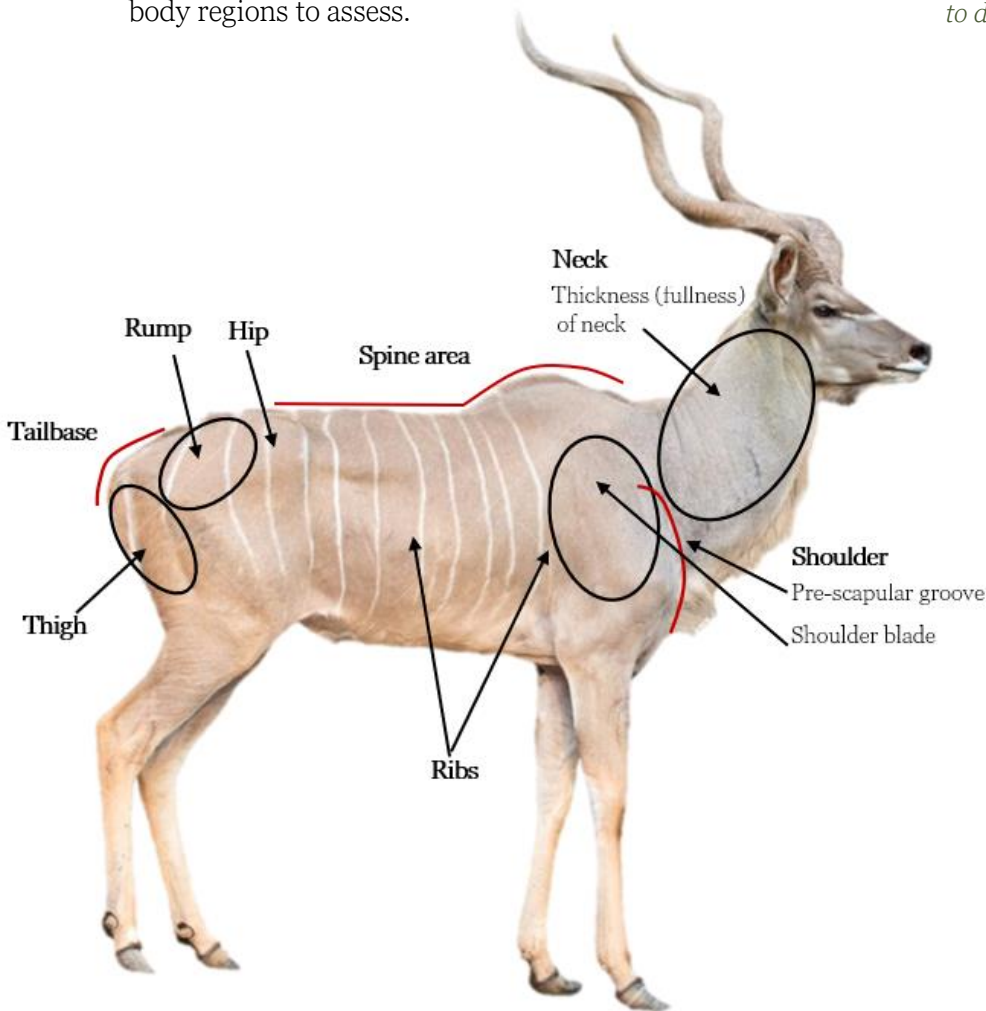
First, we observe the general appearance of the individual, with a focus on its behavior. Sick animals often isolate themselves from the herd, are not seen eating, and have a higher parasite burden (such as flies and ticks) due to a lack of grooming. In contrast, animals that are thin from insufficient food intake tend to stay with the herd and are eager to eat.

Now, we focus on the key body regions that provide the best indication of body condition: the neck, shoulder, ribs, spine, and hip area. Assess the muscle coverage (fullness) in these areas to determine if an animal is at a healthy weight, too thin, or too fat. Unlike domestic animals, antelope species rarely have a thick layer of fat.

In the below figure you can see a kudu, and the important body regions to assess.



What do you think of this eland cow? She has a poor body condition, lesions around the mouth and is full of flies and ticks. This suggests that her poor body condition is likely due to disease, rather than starvation. © M. Bijsterbosch



Kudu seen from the back, showing the pins (Afr. sitbeen). © B. Burger

How to improve body condition?

First of all, one must try and find out why the antelope is in poor condition. Is it because of no or little food availability (e.g. drought, certain minerals missing)? Or is there maybe a medical cause (e.g. worn teeth, worms)? Is the animal pregnant, or nursing a lamb or calf? Can the season be of influence (e.g. very cold)? Is it an individual animal, or the entire herd?

During drought situations

If you notice your animal(s) start losing condition and you have little grazing, it is best to start feeding your animals at an early stage, before the body condition drops severely. In this way you will minimise stock losses and reduce the grazing pressure on your pasture to ensure a quicker recovery after the first rains.

It is important to feed in multiple different areas of the farm and, at each feeding site, spread the feed out over a bigger area. This minimises dominant animals chasing timid animals away. Feeding at multiple sites makes more re-seeding possible. While eating, the animals will break soil crusts, trample hay/grass seeds into the ground, and defecate/urinate in those areas, thereby creating a “well prepared and fertilised” seed bed for the next rainy season

Consider giving your animals a lick. It might be beneficial to consult an animal nutritionist (e.g. at Feedmaster), to discuss the potential needs or excesses (like trace elements) that your animals may encounter in your specific area. You may discover that there are better ways to support your animals' health than just providing a salt lick. Additionally, you can add Browse Plus as an additive to drinking water, feed or lick. It largely counteracts the effects of tannins and thus enhances the animal's digestive process, resulting in better nutrient utilisation.

Besides roughage (grass, lucerne), add high-energy supplemental feeds:

- 🐾 Maize is full of starch, which will provide the animal with extra energy. IMPORTANT: The introduction of maize to a diet should be done SLOWLY, and in low quantities.
- 🐾 Camel thorn pods are very tasty, well digestible and highly nutritious, making them an ideal source of supplemental food.
- 🐾 Game pellets are obviously an excellent and balanced source of supplemental food and are usually reserved for high value species/exotic species in smaller game camps. However, with the current price of lucerne and grass hay, game pellets are excellent value for money (compared on cost per kg food and the percentage of food consumed).

Read more about what you could give your animals as supplemental feeding in our online article '[Feeding wildlife during a drought](#)', and read our September 2024 newsletter: '[On today's menu... Energy!](#)'

Medical reasons

If an animal is losing condition while there is sufficient food, it is best to contact your veterinarian. Take photos of the animal, describe its behaviour and describe how the animal has changed over time. If an animal dies, make the most out of your loss by performing a thorough and systematic PM (Post-Mortem) examination.

One reason for a worsening condition might be internal parasites (e.g. tape worms, round worms, flukes). Especially in small camps animals are more likely to be infected with internal parasites. The best thing would be to check the faeces, do you see worms? Your veterinarian can check the faeces for worm eggs. The type of parasite should be identified, and then the type of drugs can be determined. Be aware for resistance, the intensive use of anti-parasitic drugs in especially the livestock-industry has led to a widespread resistance against anti-parasite drugs. Treatment should always be in consultation with your veterinarian.



DEHORNING MISSION

Are you a vet, nurse or technician? And interested in rhinos and conservation? Then join the dehorning mission! Together with Worldwide Vets and the Rhino Momma Project, we will give two week-long educational courses in 2025. Here you will learn a lot about rhino care, rhino conservation and of course veterinary care aimed at rhinos. Besides lectures, we will head out in the field to observe rhinos, learn about them in the field, and we will dehorn at least six rhinos.

What can you expect?

We have prepared several interesting lectures with lots of photos and videos. We will discuss the basics, such as how the body works (neurology, respiratory, cardiovascular and digestive physiology), pharmacology (how drugs affect the body), drug accidents and the use of tranquilizers. We go a bit deeper into important topics such as infectious diseases (e.g. anthrax and rabies), and conditions such as sand impaction which could pose a threat to rhinos. We also talk about rhino body condition scores. Of course, we will handle the dart immobilization process of rhinos from A to Z.

In the field we will observe rhinos, check their body condition score, and discuss safe methods of approaching wild animals. We will have discussions in the field and around the fire about dehorning, the difficulties that private rhino owners face due to poaching and increasing costs to keep rhinos safe and the (legal) trade in rhino horn. You will do some target shooting with the dart gun and practise loading darts (with water, no worries 😊).

And then, of course the most important part of the course, is the dehorning of several rhinos. The aim is to dehorn at least six rhinos, but hopefully more! We will explain the entire process as we go, and you will help with the monitoring, collection of some of the samples and data processing. We will make sure that everybody gets a chance to be hands-on, but of course our priority is always the welfare of the rhino.

All in all, it will be an intensive, yet fun week with lots of learning experiences! You will be accommodated at Kifaru Bush Camp, in rooms with en-suite bedrooms.

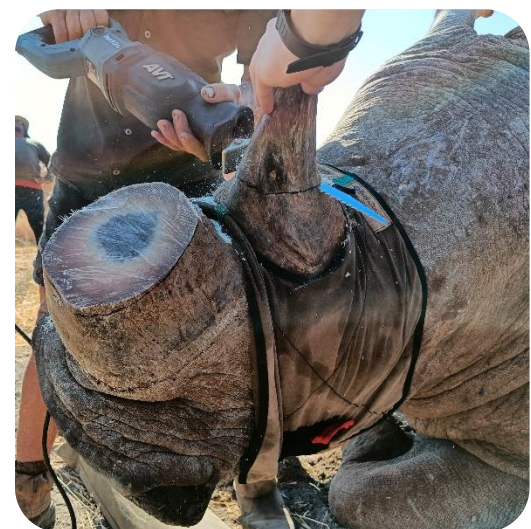
Dates:

- 🐾 24 – 30 August 2025
- 🐾 01 – 07 September 2025
- 🐾 27 September – 03 October 2026
- 🐾 04 – 10 October 2026

The course is RACE accredited for 50 hours. As per regulations of our Namibian Veterinary Council, do note that you won't be allowed to do veterinary procedures, but we guarantee you that will be hands-on and will learn a lot! If you have any questions, you are welcome to contact us, or the Worldwide Vets team.

For more information, have a look at the website:

<https://www.worldwide-vets.org/Projects/rhino-dehorning-mission>



CX926376

THEY SAY STRIPES ARE SLIMMING

NOT THAT MANY OF THEM!



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