NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER

In this newsletter:

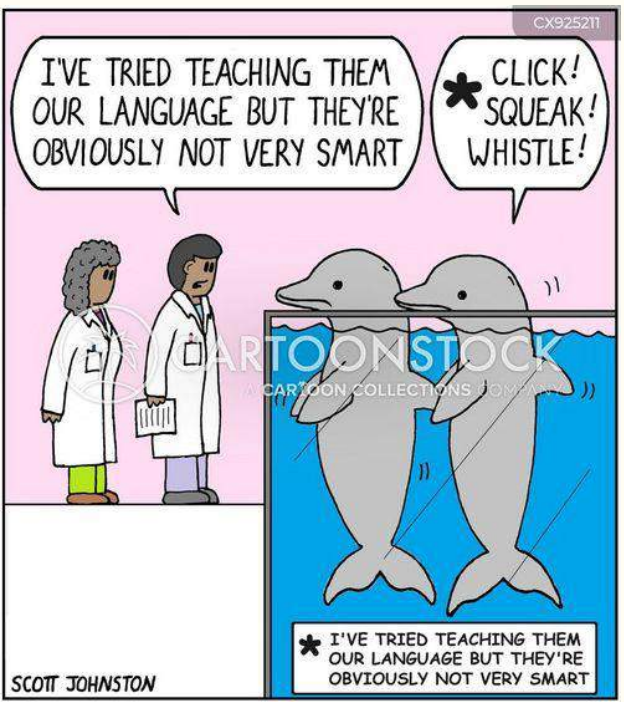
Dear clients,
From barking impalas to singing whales, animals have languages of their own, and they are often far more complex than we assume. Dr Ulf made it to the finals of the Worldwide Vets Golden Star Award, we hope you will vote one more time for him! We have some amazing calendars available, nice as a Christmas gift, or for yourself! We give an overview of the courses we present, we hope to do some in 2026! Let us know if you are interested. Lastly we give more information about the viral disease Rift Valley Fever. Kind regards, Wildlife Vets Namibia team

ANIMALS TALK TOO!

As you sit on your veranda, listening to the sounds of nature, you might here impala rams bark, jackals howling and zebras snort. These are not just random sounds, it is communication, and nature has developed some amazing ways!

Pet owners might know that their pets understand them often very well (or play being deaf on purpose). But animal communication is far more complex than we often assume. Some dog species, like border collies, can mentally sort their toys by its function, instead of just by name or appearance. In experiments, the dogs learned to associate which toys were for fetching ('throw'), and which ones were for tug-of-war games ('pull'). When the dogs were given new toys, they figured out in which group the toy belonged, just by playing with them.

Another study showed that elephants use unique calls as 'names' for each other. The special call seems to identify a certain individual, and the other elephants responded more when the call was meant for them; a way of showing recognition. Another study showed that bottlenose dolphins use unique 'signature whistles' that act like a name. The dolphins responded to their own whistle when it was played, and they could call specific dolphins by 'saying' their name. In Savannah sparrows, it appears that different groups of the same species develop their own 'micro-dialects'. The birds have small local variations in their songs. Even more impressive, sperm whales use click patterns, called 'codas' to communicate. By changing the rhythm, tempo, duration and number of codas, the whales combine simple sounds to complex patterns. This is quite similar to how we use sounds to make different words!



Is it surprising to us that animals 'talk' too? Well... actually not of course, because each species has evolved its own way of sharing information, but the diversity of communication is amazing. One thing we must not do, is comparing animal communication to our own human language (with words, grammar and syntax). Helen Pilcher from the Guardian made a nice analogy: *A cuttlefish would never understand human sarcasm, at the same time a human will never fully understand the shifting skin colours of the cuttlefish.* Animals do not just make sounds, but also use colours, smells, electricity, vibrations and movement to communicate. We miss out on much of this communication because we humans do not have all the sensory organs to perceive it.

Human language may seem sophisticated, but don't underestimate animals!

WORLDWIDE VETS GOLDEN STAR AWARD

We are super proud! Ulf has been selected as a **finalist** in the 2025 Worldwide Vets Golden Star Award! The Worldwide Vets Golden Star Award is an annual award presented by Worldwide Vets to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to animal welfare or conservation. The award honours "everyday heroes" for their work in protecting, rescuing, healing, and advocating for animals around the globe.

Thank you so much for everyone who voted so far. Being nominated was already a huge honour, but to be in the finals is really special! Now we are down to the last stretch!

The **final voting** is open from 14 November - 01 December 2025, and we would truly be grateful if you could vote for Ulf Tubbesing! ✅

The winner receives £250 (which we obviously will share), plus £500 to a charity of their choice. We have chosen the Rhino Momma Project, a project close to our hearts! Let's bring the Golden Star to Namibia this year!

Visit this link to cast your vote:

https://www.worldwide-vets.org/goldenstaraward

CALENDARS AVAILABLE!

Are you looking for a nice Christmas gift? Or do you need a calendar yourself to keep 2026 organized? We are excited to share that Emily Tubbesing, Ulf's daughter, has created her very first calendars! As a talented nature artist and photographer, she made two designs:

🦒 **Wildlife and Nature**; breathtaking wildlife and nature photography

🌿 **Abstract**; compositions inspired by patterns and textures found in nature

Click here for sneak-peek video of the calendars on Emily's Instagram, or send us a message to receive the video via WhatsApp or email.

The calendars are available at **Rhino Park Veterinary Clinic** and the **Zero Waste Store** in Windhoek. You can also contact Emily directly via her Instagram page emily_tubbesing or via email: emily.tubbesing@icloud.com. Alternatively, feel free to contact us.

Please note, there is limited stock available so don't wait too long!

WILDLIFE VETS NAMIBIA

Click here to view the course outlines

COURSES

Recently we presented our Animal Crime Scene and Evidence Handling Course, which reminded us that it has been some time since we last offered our courses! We would like to resume these courses in 2026 again. Should you be interested, ask people in your area if they are interested too. If we have sufficient interest and there is an appropriate venue nearby, we gladly arrange the course in your area. Below you will find a summary of the two courses.

Post-Mortem Course

In Namibia, vets need to travel long distances to come out to a farm. This means that Post-Mortems on game or livestock are not regularly done, and this is a shame! Identifying the cause of death provides valuable information about herd health, and supports you in making better management steps in future. At the same time, farmers and vets will gain valuable knowledge about diseases affecting animals in Namibia.

We believe farmers can benefit greatly from learning how to do proper post-mortem examinations themselves. In our 1.5 day course we will teach you how to do a systematic Post-Mortem, take useful photos and collect samples. This information you could send to your own vet, and together you will be better able to figure out why an animal has died. This is an intensive yet practical hands-on course.




Animal Crime Scene and Evidence Handling Course

Poaching is one of the biggest threats to both wildlife and livestock. It is not just about ivory and horn, meat poaching also causes serious losses for farmers and harms conservation. When an animal is poached, it is vital that the crime scene and evidence are handled correctly, so that the culprits can be arrested and convicted. Poor investigative techniques, as well as errors in crime scene processing and evidence collection/handling are amongst the main causes for poor arrest and conviction rates for these crimes.

This 2.5 day course designed for farmers, managers, anti-poaching units, rangers, police officers, and anyone who may face poaching and or livestock theft. The course is a mix of lectures and practical training. The better we all become in crime scene securing and handling, the better the chances are that the culprits are being caught!

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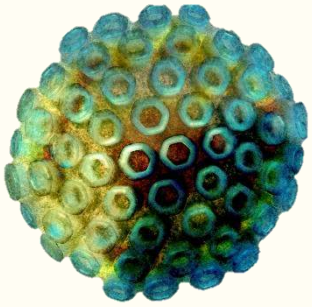


RIFT VALLEY FEVER OUTBREAK SA

As if the ongoing Foot-and-Mouth Disease outbreak in South-Africa is not enough, recently an outbreak of Rift Valley Fever (RVF) has been confirmed near Kakamas and Augrabies Falls, just across the border from Namibia. In this article we explain more about the disease, and how you can recognize it.

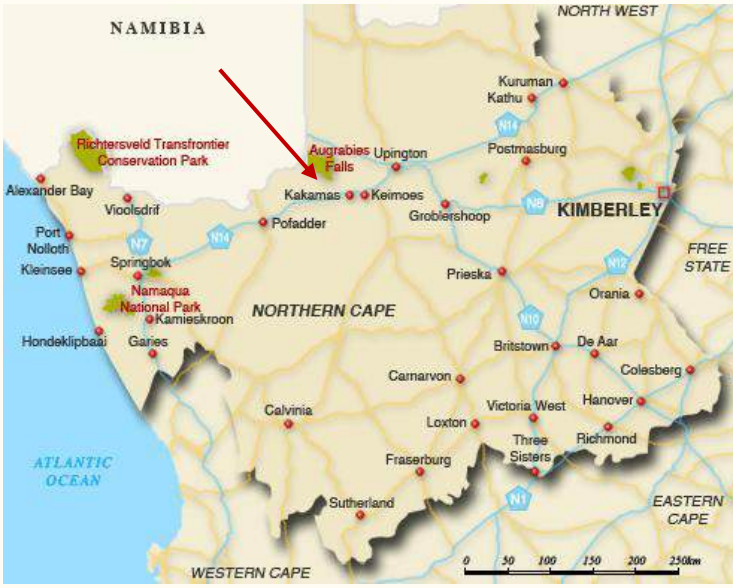
What are zoonoses?

Before we dive into the RVF topic, let us first discuss zoonoses. Zoonoses are diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans. There are many different examples, think of rabies, anthrax, tuberculosis, and thus also Rift Valley Fever. You may have heard about the very recent Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, in a patient that died in the Khomas Region – also a zoonosis, caused by ticks. All these diseases are stark reminders of the growing threat that is posed to us humans by zoonoses!

Zoonotic diseases can be caused by different pathogens, e.g. bacteria, viruses or parasites. Transmission may occur via direct contact with infected animals, by eating contaminated food, or via vectors such as mosquitos.

Rift Valley Fever outbreak in South-Africa

On 14 November, the Directorate Veterinary Services in the Northern Cape issued an urgent health alert, about a Rift Valley Fever (RVF) outbreak in a sheep population in the Northern Cape's Kakamas area near Augrabies Falls.



The last large outbreak of RVF in South-Africa was 2010-2011 in the Free State, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape, which included more than 200 human cases and widespread livestock losses. The Northern Cape could be called a hotspot, due to the flood-prone pans and grazing areas, which form a perfect habitat for mosquitos. The RVF virus is carried by mosquitos. Outbreaks often occur after heavy rainfall cycles, as they trigger mosquito hatching.

The last confirmed RVF outbreak in Namibia occurred in 2010, and affected sheep, goats and cattle in the Hardap and Karas regions (southern Namibia). Fortunately since then, Namibia had remained free from RVF, but the outbreak close to the border is considered a risk (e.g. due to cross-border movement of livestock). RVF is strongly linked to rainfall and flooding, so the irrigation schemes and flood plains (e.g. Hardap and Orange River) could potentially provide a good habitat for mosquitos.

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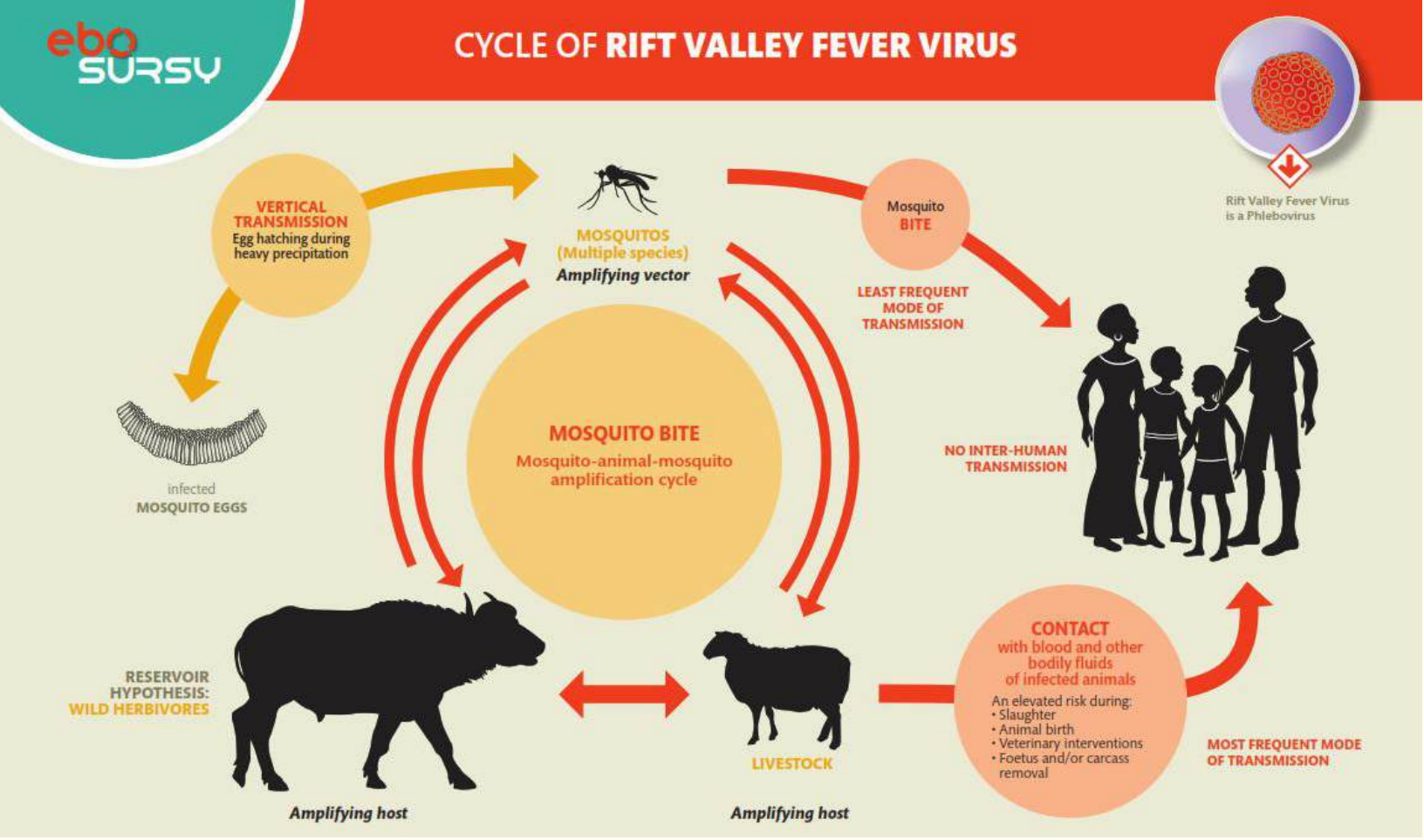
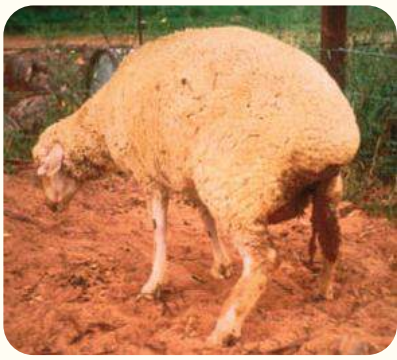


This figure shows how the RVF virus spreads between mosquitos, animals and people © WOHA.

1) Some mosquitos (especially *Aedes* species) lay eggs that already carry the RVF virus. We call this vertical transmission; the virus is passed from the mother mosquito to her eggs. These infected eggs can survive the dry seasons in the soil. When heavy rains come, the eggs hatch, and the young mosquitos already carry the virus.
2) The mosquito is a so-called '*Amplifying vector*', which means it helps spreading the disease faster and wider. The infected *Aedes* species bites animals, and infects them. They start the outbreak. Once the animals are infected, *Culox* mosquitos bite the animals and pick up the virus. These mosquitos multiply rapidly and spread the virus to more animals.
3) Infected livestock and wild herbivores are '*Amplifying hosts*'. They could carry a lot of the RVP virus in their blood. The mosquito drinks the virus-loaded blood, becomes infected, and passes the virus on when it bites other animals. This means that these infected animals help to circulate the virus, and this can lead to large outbreaks.
4) Humans do not often get RVF from mosquito bites. Transmission usually occurs when people handle sick animals and get into contact with blood or fluids from these sick animals, for example during slaughter, animal births, veterinary work or by removing aborted foetuses or carcasses. RVF does NOT spread from human to human.

RVF symptoms in animals



A ewe aborting due to RVF © Prof Coetzer, University of Pretoria

The clinical signs of RVF are often non-specific, which makes it sometimes hard to recognize. The most important signs to look out for are abortion storms and a high mortality in young animals.

Young sheep and goats are very susceptible, and mortality rates can reach 90-100%. The lamb will have fever, is weak, has bloody diarrhoea, jaundice, and rapid death. The mortality rate in adults is lower (10-30%), and abortions are the most obvious symptom. It often affects nearly all pregnant ewes in a herd. Other signs are fever, lethargy nasal discharge, jaundice and losing weight.

In cattle calves mortality could be up to 70%. Symptoms in calves are fever, weakness, diarrhoea and jaundice. In adults the signs are fever, losing weight, nasal discharge and reduced milk yield, but the symptoms are usually less severe then in sheep/goats. A common sign is abortion.

Wild ruminants usually do not show signs of RVF, but abortions have been reported.

RVF symptoms in humans

As mentioned, RVF is a zoonosis. The RVF virus typically causes flu-like illness, this can include fever, muscle and joint pain and headaches. In severe cases (less than 10% of all human RVF cases) it could lead to Retinitis (eye disease – blurred vision, retina lesions, sometimes blindness), Meningoencephalitis (brain inflammation – severe headaches, hallucinations, convulsions) or the dangerous Haemorrhagic fever form (jaundice, vomiting blood, bleeding, and eventually death).

If you encounter sick animals that display the above mentioned symptoms, especially with associated abortion storms and a high mosquito load, avoid:

- Assisting with birthing or abortion events.
- Any contact with blood, tissue or aborted foetuses.
- Do not slaughter, skin or consume (meat and milk) possibly infected carcasses.

If you suspect RVF, contact your veterinarian immediately!!

Take home message

There is no need to panic, but since the outbreak is close to the Namibian border, it is good to be extra alert. Take note of official announcements. Familiarize yourself with the symptoms, and explain these to your workers. If you have a suspicious case, contact your veterinarian – do not take chances!

You can vaccinate your herds, contact your veterinarian for more information. The RVF Clone 13 vaccine from OBP is widely used, but remember this is a live vaccine and is not recommended in pregnant livestock due to the risk of abortion. The vaccine is most effective before heavy rains (and the subsequent increase in mosquitos).

Reduce mosquito populations by avoiding standing water, clean water throughs and tanks regularly and where possible, cover water storages.

If animals are aborting or dying suddenly, do not handle them without protection. Call your vet immediately!

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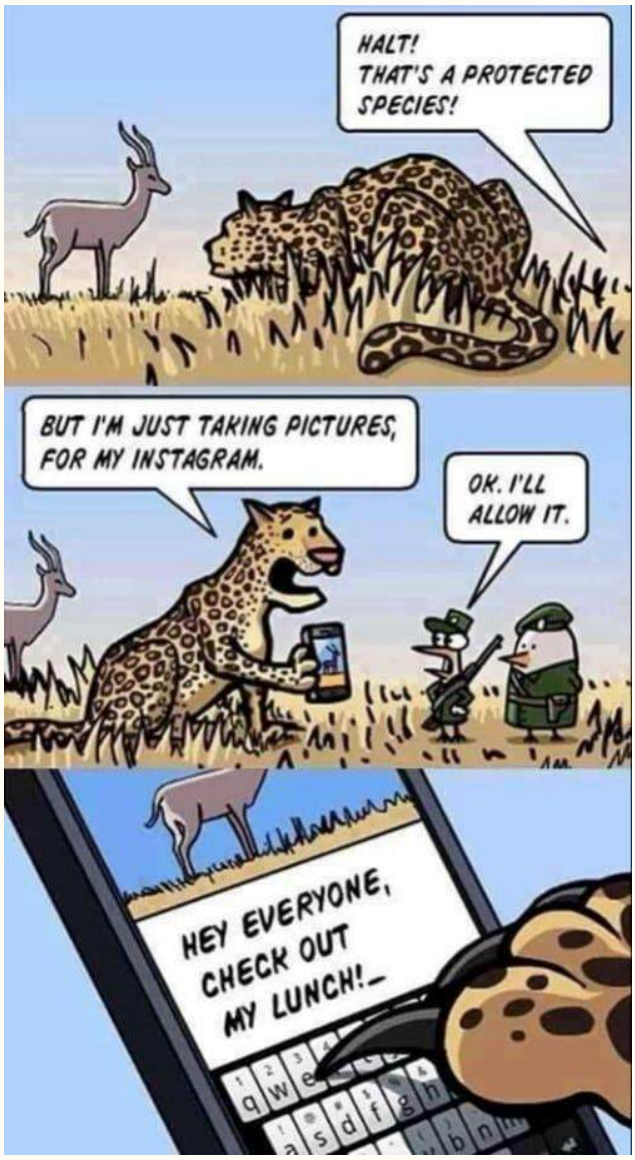

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