NEWSLETTER JANUARY

In this newsletter:

Dear clients,
We are already almost a month underway, but nonetheless the best wishes for 2026! To kick off the first newsletter of the year, we begin with... a yawn! Ever wondered why humans and even animals yawn? By the end of this article you do! Since the game capture season is now approaching fast, we have also put together some key points to keep in mind. The last topic is on the Foot-and-Mouth Disease situation in SA. We ALL must do our part to prevent this disease from entering Namibia. Kind regards, the Wildlife Vets Namibia team

HAPPY 2026!

We hope the new year has started well for you and your animals, and that your veld is already looking nice and green! As always, we very much look forward to supporting you with veterinary services, wildlife management, and practical advice throughout this new year.

Thank you for your continued trust. We are looking forward to being of service to you in 2026 and wish you a wonderful year ahead, blessed with excellent health and lots of happiness which follow good rains!

Kind regards, Ulf and Mariska

START THE YEAR WITH A YAWN

We trust you all had great holidays, are well rested and ready to start the new year. We are sure that, following the New Year's parties everyone was doing this... yawning! This is also common behaviour in animals. Considering the fact that they usually get plenty of sleep, why do they do this?

Yawning is a behaviour we all know and associate with being tired, however, the deeper meaning and/or function of yawning is, especially in animals, still not fully known. What we do know, is that there are two types of yawning.

The first one is **spontaneous yawning**. This is a physiological response, and in general, we associate this with being tired or bored. Many people think that with yawning more oxygen is inhaled. But some studies found that there is no significant change in blood oxygenation after yawning. A more plausible explanation is that yawning helps to cool the brain. The deep inhalation and stretching of facial muscles increases the flow of cooler blood to the brain, which helps to regulate brain temperature. Yawning is often triggered by a transition, for example when waking up, getting tired, or when an activity is about to happen (e.g. doing a workout or an exam), and makes one more alert.

A yawning lioness. Interestingly, researchers found that larger animals tend to have longer yawns. It makes sense; the larger or more active the brain is, the more cooling it needs. © M. Bijsterbosch

The second one is **contagious yawning**. This type of yawning is more of a social response, and we are sure you know this..., one person starts yawning, and a bit later you start yawning too! According to research, the likelihood of yawning increases sixfold after you observe somebody else yawn! Contagious yawning is something which occurs in humans, several primate species, dogs, wolves, budgies and lions. This type of yawning might be related to something which we call '*social mirroring*'. When somebody yawns, you yawn, when somebody smiles at you, you smile back. This phenomenon has interested researchers for a long time, but we still do not really know what the function exactly is. What we do know, is that all the above-mentioned species are very social, and contagious yawning is therefore likely to be linked to empathy and social bonding. Dogs are known to sometimes yawn after the owner just yawned. If you yawn and your dog starts yawning too, it might be that your dog is reinforcing the close emotional bond between you two.

In lions, this contagious yawning (one lion yawns, and the rest also start yawning) promotes *motor synchrony*, which means the group is more likely to act together (= synchronize the pride's movement), whether it is resting, moving or preparing to hunt. It helps the lions to align their behaviour. It is basically like a silent message: "I'm getting ready to rest... or move... or to hunt."

We do hope this article did not make you yawn!

GAME CAPTURE SEASON

In Namibia we are bound to a game capture season, where animals may only be captured and translocated from February (north)/March (south) until the end of September (north)/October (south). This is on the one side due to the weather; it is hot, and rains might make transport more difficult. But more importantly, many species are calving/lambing, or have youngsters on foot. Since the 2026 game capture season is around the corner, we have some important notes.

If you apply for a new game capture permit (catch, keep and sell), it is a good idea to include as many species as possible, and submit a management plan. This will allow the permit to include an **'export'** option on your animals. Also, do not forget about your Game Fence Registration. Is it still valid or should it be renewed?

We will be doing some exports this year, so please feel free to contact us if you have animals available, and ensure that your capture permit is valid for exporting. We can of course also assist you with the transport of game within Namibia.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

Have you made any New Year's resolutions? Ours is to be of even better assistance to you! To keep things running as smoothly as possible, here are a few key points we would like to highlight:

- ✓ If you have any **big jobs** planned for 2026, please inform us well in advance about the date(s), and what needs to be done. Then we can ensure that we book enough time for you, and bring the right drugs, equipment etc. Speak to your **neighbours and surrounding farms** if you can synchronise work in your area so everybody benefits. The farmers share helicopter ferry and our travelling costs, while we spend less time on the road and get more work done in a shorter time.
- ✓ If you have any **special requests**, please let us know in time. Sometimes we will need to pack extra kit or order products. Our car is big, but not big enough to carry all our kit around throughout the year 😉 Examples of special requests:
    - Pet vaccinations
    - Any kind of surgery (e.g., dog/cat castration)
    - Pregnancy diagnosis (we do not routinely take the ultrasound machine along, since this is bulky and a high value and sensitive machine)
    - Bull or ram fertility testing
    - Microscopic examination (as with the ultrasound machine, the microscope is sensitive equipment)
    - Horn capping equipment. To protect horns against wearing off, we can put caps and/or sleeves over the horns.
    - Hoof grinder. If you have an animal with long hooves, let us know in advance so we can bring our hoof grinder with.
- ✓ If antelope work needs to be done, please have **plastic pipes** ready that we can put over the horns. This is to protect all those standing on the back of the bakkie.
- ✓ It is always good to take a **can of water** with on the bakkie for e.g. washing hands, cooling down animals when they get too hot, and washing out possible wounds.
- ✓ When you apply for your **game capture permits**, make sure you apply for <u>all species</u>, and <u>include your management plan</u>. This makes it easier for game dealers to buy your animals for the export market.
- ✓ If you have rhinos that need dehorning, feel free to contact us. We have some groups who might be interested in joining and who are willing to contribute to the costs.

Here we protect the sable's horn tips by first adding a cap, followed by a small, and then a larger sleeve. The sleeves are secured firmly to ensure they remain in place during the sable's normal daily activity, and prevent the horn tips from wearing off.
© M. Bijsterbosch

We are looking forward to this new year, and we hope you too!

WILDLIFE VETS NAMIBIA

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

The Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak in South Africa began in 2019, with a few sporadic outbreaks outside the traditionally FMD infected and surveillance zones. From there, new outbreaks emerged in 2021, gradually spreading through the various provinces and regions. In 2025 and now 2026 the disease is spreading like an out-of-control veld fire.

FMD is a highly contagious viral disease that affects cloven-hooved animals (animals with split hooves). Think of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats, but also buffalo and antelopes. Young calves and lambs are particularly vulnerable. FMD does NOT infect humans, but it obviously has a huge effect on farming operations and trade.

Symptoms

- Cattle are most susceptible to the virus and show clear clinical signs. These include fever, weight loss, drooling and blisters and sores on the mouth, nose, hooves and teats. They will have a reduced milk yield, and secondary infections usually follow.
- Infected domestic pigs shed large amounts of the virus, and act as amplifiers (=they supercharge the outbreak by flooding the environment with virus). They usually have blisters and sores on the snout and feet, which result in loss of appetite and lameness.
- Sheep and goats are relatively resistant and may show mild or no symptoms at all, making detection difficult. Even though they are infected but do not show signs, they can spread the virus.
- Buffalo can become infected, but rarely show signs of the disease.
- Antelopes also can become infected, and might show (mild) mouth lesions, drooling and lameness, but the disease is usually not fatal.

Classical signs of FMD in cattle include blisters and sores in the mouth and nose, on the feet and on teats. FMD is very painful and causes salivation, nasal discharge and loss of appetite. From left to right: © Eufmd, NDSU

Transmission

FMD is very contagious, and the fact that is spreads rapidly, and can survive for weeks in the soil makes it a disease which is difficult to control. The virus is spread via:

- Direct animal contact: the virus is spread via saliva, milk, breathing and secretions.
- Contaminated surfaces: feeding troughs, food, water sources and farming equipment, as well as vehicles can carry the virus. This also includes clothes, shoes etc.
- The virus can be spread via water (e.g. rivers) from infected to clean farms.
- Animal movement: moving infected animals can rapidly spread the disease.

WILDLIFE VETS NAMIBIA

FMD in Wildlife

Antelopes and wild pig species (warthog, bushpig) can get FMD if they are exposed (e.g. graze close to infected cattle). They are what we call 'spillover hosts'. They can get FMD, and shortly spread the virus, but they do not maintain the virus long-term. They might show mild lesions as described above but the disease is usually not fatal. Once they recover from the virus, the virus is no longer spread.

The African buffalo on the other hand can carry the FMD virus for years, without them showing symptoms (asymptomatic carriers). This makes the buffalo a 'reservoir host', which means they could potentially spread the virus for years, without them showing any signs of the disease.

However, it is VERY important to note that in recent years none of the outbreaks in South-Africa originated from buffalo. The current FMD wave began in communal dip tanks and cattle herds, spreading rapidly due to uncontrolled cattle movements. This distinction is important: buffalo remain a reservoir, but the immediate threat to farmers and markets is cattle-driven FMD transmission.

In Namibia, strict regulations apply in the FMD-free zone ,south of the veterinary cordon fence (the 'red line'). As a result, game farmers are not allowed to even keep disease-free buffalo (tested under the most stringent conditions and kept in strict isolation) on farms south of the Namibian red line. An interesting fact is that even though there are well over 3800 registered disease-free buffalo farms in SA, not a single FMD outbreak over the past 15 years could be traced back to buffalo in the previously clean areas of SA. In fact, buffalo farms are now under severe threat of the disease spilling over from cattle to their FMD free buffalo! Should this happen, infected buffalo herds will be culled, whereas cattle herds will be vaccinated against the disease.

This has serious consequences, not just from a national economic perspective, it also seriously undermines the profitability of livestock farming which will see many farmers (if the spill-over into buffalo occurs, also game farmers) going bankrupt – we all know what the emotional impact will be.

South-Africa's approach to control FMD

As mentioned, the situation in South-Africa is severe. By January 2026, FMD has spread to seven of the nine south-African provinces, with KwaZulu-Natal being the epicentre. For years the South-African government has relied on movement restrictions (which were not well enforced), quarantine and Disease Management Areas (DMAs) to contain FMD. Only in 2025 did the government decide to implement mass vaccination.

The South-African government is currently using a killed FMD vaccine that is produced by the Botswana Vaccine Institute. The vaccine targets the three FMD strains that are currently in South-Africa; SAT1, SAT2 and SAT3. The vaccine does not cure infected animals, but it protects cattle from clinical disease and reduces virus shedding, this in the end slows disease transmission.

Despite the vaccination strategy and tighter animal movement controls, experts in South-Africa are worried. FMD is a state-controlled disease, which means that only the government is allowed to buy and distribute the vaccines.

In this 9-minute YouTube video, Dr. Frans Cronje gives a clear, practical explanation of FMD, focusing on what it is, how it spreads, and why it matters for farmers and veterinarians in southern Africa.

What does this mean for Namibia?

If FMD enters Namibia, the consequences will be severe. Namibia is currently recognized by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) as an FMD-free zone south of the veterinary cordon fence (the 'red line'). If FMD is detected, it means that infected livestock will be culled, or a mass vaccination campaign will be started (if vaccine is available). It would cause a suspension to livestock and meat exports from Namibia. This will not just ripple the livestock industry (the loss of FMD-free status could cost Namibia billions in export earnings), but also the thousands of people whose livelihood depends on the meat industry. Regaining WOAH recognition is a long and complex process that can take many years.

What now?

We must ALL work together to prevent this disease from entering Namibia. That means ensuring NO cloven hooved animals may cross the border into Namibia (including the Orange river!). The risk that expensive game or livestock is being smuggled through the porous border between Namibia and SA cannot be over emphasized! If you see any such activity, immediately report this to the veterinary authorities and NAMPOL.

FMD is highly contagious and can cling to shoes, vehicle tyres, and equipment. It can also survive in raw, dried, or processed meat, milk, cheese, and dairy. Cold does not destroy the virus, it can remain infectious even in fridges and freezers. Therefore, for travellers this means do not bring in any meat, dairy or other products (incl. padkos!) from cloven-hoofed animals from South-Africa to Namibia. Vehicles and equipment coming from infected areas should be disinfected.

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