

NEWSLETTER MARCH

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Dear clients,

We hope you are well and had a good rainy week so far! It is already the end of March, so time for our newsletter! In this edition you can read about banded mongoose bonds, why do they live in such big groups? We are very proud to introduce you to our new team member, Dr Max! He joined us this month and we are very excited to have him in our team. If you have game that you want to sell, or if you want to buy game, please feel free to contact us. We gladly assist you. Lastly, with the early rains, we see a lot of weed popping up, two examples are the Vermeerbos and the John Deere Bush.

Kind regards, the Wildlife Vets Namibia team

BANDED MONGOOSE BONDS

Banded mongooses are small carnivores with a very interesting social life. Unlike many carnivores that live solitary or in small family units, the banded mongoose thrives in large colonies, sometimes numbering up to 40 to even 60 individuals! But how do they live in such big groups without constant fighting?

One of the most interesting aspects of their behaviour is that that banded mongooses practise communal breeding. Instead of competing, females synchronize their births so that pups are born around the same time, and raised together. Adults share the responsibility of feeding, grooming, and protecting the young. This reduces rivalry between mothers and ensures that every pup has a better chance of survival. This is a great example of how cooperation can outweigh competition. Living in a group also provides better protection against predators.

At the same time, living in groups is not without tension... as you can imagine! Each individual mongoose still wants to pass on its own genes, which obviously brings in moments of competition. Males compete for mating opportunities, and females must weigh the benefits and costs of raising their pups communally. Share responsibility for the pups will help the group, but at the same time it means less attention for their own offspring.

Ultimately, banded mongooses navigate a delicate balance between cooperation and conflict. Even though individuals sometimes compete, the overall advantages (better protection from predators, shared parenting, increased survival etc.) of living in a big group far outweigh the downsides. They survive far better in large groups than they would alone or in small family units.

To strengthen social bonds, banded mongoose groom each other. They also use scent marking as a form of communication, leaving chemical 'messages' that says something about their identity, territory, or reproductive status. When danger appears, they can be remarkably brave, often working together to mob and drive off predators such as snakes.



A group of mongooses is called a troop. What it comes down to, is that the benefits of group living outweigh the risks of competition. © [Baobabridge](#)

INTRODUCING DR MAX!

We are excited to introduce our new member... Dr Max! He joined us this month, getting to know our style of working, and we are proud to have him on our team! He brings years of wildlife veterinary experience from South Africa, including buffalo and black rhino immobilisations, and also enjoys cattle work. On top of that, he has valuable expertise with capture and darting equipment.

Here is a quick introduction from Max, and we hope you will get to meet him soon! With two full-time veterinarians now available, we will be able to increase our support and availability in Namibia and abroad. Feel free to contact us or Max directly, if you need our services.



Hi everyone!

My name is Maximilian Krings, and I recently joined Wildlife Vets Namibia. I am a wildlife veterinarian from northern Namibia with a strong background in conservation-focused, field-based veterinary work. Having grown up on a game and cattle farm near Otjiwarongo, I developed an early respect for wildlife and natural systems, which inspired me to pursue a degree in Veterinary Science at the University of Pretoria, graduating in 2022.

I began my career with the Cheetah Conservation Fund, supporting applied research and conservation initiatives, before completing my community service with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife in South Africa. During this time, I gained extensive experience in wildlife immobilisation, population management, and conservation interventions. My work included collaring carnivores, antelope, and mega-herbivores for monitoring and research purposes, as well as large-scale antelope capture operations. I was also involved in key rhino conservation interventions, including the translocation, dehorning, and airlifting of both black and white rhino.

Through my work, I have collaborated with a number of conservation organisations, including African Wildlife Vets, World Wildlife Fund, Black Rhino Range Expansion Project, Wildlife Act, Endangered Wildlife Trust, African Parks, and the Black Rhino Conservation Project, contributing to multidisciplinary conservation and wildlife management efforts.

In 2025 I joined Motsumi Darts where I have gained valuable experience in buffalo immobilisation and have been involved in the development and testing of wildlife capture equipment. I also did a lot of game farm management work, such as moving a wide variety of antelope species. Through my work at Motsumi, I have gained important insights into the current challenges posed by Foot-and-Mouth disease in South Africa.



This year I returned to Namibia, and this is very special to me. Namibia's landscapes, wildlife, and conservation culture are unique, and it is a privilege to be able to contribute to wildlife health and conservation in my home country. I am excited to be part of the team at Wildlife Vets Namibia and look forward to supporting conservation and wildlife management efforts across the country and abroad.

If I can be of your assistance, or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Cheers!

Maximilian Krings



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GAME FOR SALE, OR LOOKING FOR GAME?

Are you selling game, or looking to buy? We can assist you! As registered unlimited game dealers we can legally assist you with all wildlife translocations, from small antelopes right up to elephants. Our specialized game trucks are built for tough African terrain and can operate in sand, mountains and remote areas.

When applying for a game-capture permit, remember to include your management plan. This will make it easier to export game. When we do exports, we focus on projects within Africa.



Game translocation to the DRC, check the video [here](#) © M Bijsterbosch

THE RISE OF THE VERMEERBOS AND JOHN DEER BUSH

As we drive and work in different parts of the country, we have noticed a huge increase in both the Vermeerbos and John Deere bush. This is likely due to the early rains in December, but at the same time it tells us something about the veld condition and grazing pressure.

The Vermeerbos

The Vermeerbos is a *Geigeria* species, a woody and fast-spreading perennial shrub which is commonly found in central and northern Namibia. It is a low woody shrub that has multiple stems arising from a woody rootstock, with narrow green leaves and yellow daisy-like flowers. It often forms patches. It tends to germinate quickly after early or above-average rains. Combine the early rains with disturbed or bare soil, and the ideal condition is created for the Vermeerbos to germinate, establish and spread.

The seeds of the Vermeerbos are held in the shrub's bracts (this is a small protective cover around the seeds). When sufficient rain falls, the bracts break open and release the seeds onto the soil. The moist soil triggers quick germination. Because the seeds are small, light and produced in large numbers, they establish quickly and often outcompete the grasses.



This may look nice and green, but in this area the Vermeerbos is outcompeting the grass, and grass has a hard time coming up © Farmer in south-east Namibia

Most animals avoid this shrub, but when grazing is scarce they might eat it. Repeated intake of the Vermeerbos can lead to Vermeersiekte. The name comes from the Afrikaans 'vermeer', which means to tremble or quiver (not to vomiting, as it is sometimes translated as 'vomiting disease'). This is one of the most important plant poisonings of sheep in southern Africa. The toxins (called *sesquiterpene lactones*) that are found in the Vermeerbos accumulate in the muscle tissue, especially in the oesophagus and skeletal muscles, and damage these muscles slowly over time. Because the damage is gradual, the animal may look fine for days or weeks while the toxins accumulate. Once enough muscle fibres are damaged, symptoms start:

- 🐾 Trembling and muscle shivering
- 🐾 Weakness, especially in the hind quarters
- 🐾 Difficulty swallowing, drooling
- 🐾 Collapse
- 🐾 Death

John Deere bush

The John Deere bush (*Nidorella resedifolia*) is a forb that spreads rapidly after good rains, especially in disturbed soil and overgrazed veld. The name John Deere bush is not a scientific name, but rather a nickname that has been given by farmers, due to the bright green foliage and yellow flowers (like the colours of a John Deere tractor).

The John Deere bush has soft non-woody stems, grows up to about 1 meter tall, and produces clusters of bright yellow flowers. Detailed ecological studies on this plant are limited, but its behaviour fits the typical pattern of fast-growing annual forbs in semi-arid areas. Rainfall triggers rapid seed germination, followed by quick root and leaf development, and then fast flowering and seed production. The plant produces many small seeds that accumulate in the soil over several seasons. When good rains arrive, thousands of these seeds germinate at once, creating the characteristic 'yellow carpets'.

This species thrives in disturbed soil, such as overgrazed and/or trampled areas and along roads. Animals tend to avoid the John Deere bush because of its strong smell and taste, and overall unpalatability. The forb does contain alkaloids, which can be harmful when eaten in large quantities, but poisoning is unlikely unless the grazing pressure is extremely high and no other food is available.



While the John Deere bush is not a poisonous plant like the Vermeerbos, it does have an impact on the veld, since it reduces the available grazing; it competes with grasses and can dominate entire areas. These photos were taken in the Otjiwarongo area. © M. Bijsterbosch

Prevention

Preventing these plants from appearing is not easy and requires consistent veld management over several seasons. Although the Vermeerbos and John Deere bush are very different plants, they are both symptoms of the same veld problem: overgrazed, disturbed soil with weak perennial grass cover. When grass is depleted and soil is disturbed, bare soil opens the door for fast growing forbs and woody shrubs to take over.

It is important to keep your stocking rates realistic and to avoid overgrazing. This is easier to manage with livestock than with game, but avoiding overgrazing is equally important in both systems. Regular annual or biannual game counts help you understand how wildlife numbers are changing and whether the veld can support them. For livestock, rotating camps and resting veld, especially after the first rains, gives grasses time to recover and rebuild root reserves. When grass cover is strong, both the Vermeerbos and John Deere bush will decline.

Mechanical control of these plants is possible by pulling or cutting the plants **before they seed**, but this is obviously very labour-intensive and not practical on huge areas of land. Removing plants early in the season prevents new seed from entering the soil seed bank, which is especially useful for annuals like John Deere bush. For the Vermeerbos, hand-pulling only works on very young plants, as older shrubs usually resprout unless the rootstock is removed. Herbicides can be effective when used correctly and at the right growth stage, but they must be applied with care and only after consulting qualified experts! Different products work on different plant types, and incorrect use can damage grasses and other vegetation!

Fire can kill seedlings and weaken young shrubs, but it must be used responsibly and only under safe conditions! Fire is most effective when there is enough grass fuel to carry a hot, clean burn. In degraded veld with little grass, fire may not spread well and can even worsen bare soil if used incorrectly.

The moral of the story, prevention is key, which depends on rebuilding a strong perennial grass cover through realistic stocking rates and careful veld management.

An important note about translocations; animals that are being relocated are often hungry since they do not eat during the transport (*please note that on long transports we always have good quality teff and lucerne available for our animals!*). When possible, do not release animals in camps with a lot of Vermeerbos, or other toxic plants such as slangkop (Osananga Lilly) or duwweeltjies (Devil's thorn). [Read more](#) about these plants in our April 2024 and November 2022 newsletters).



"I know you're my family, but I don't find these visits comforting."

Dr Ulf Tubbesing

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