

NEWSLETTER MAY

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Dear clients,

We hope this newsletter finds you well. Have you ever had the chance to see a lion's tongue up close? Hopefully only while it was sleeping 😊 Cat tongues are covered with sharp hooks, and we explain why. We have received reports of rabies outbreaks in the Dordabis and Wilhelmstal areas. If you encounter rabies on your farm, please let us know so we can warn others. If you cannot reach Ulf or Max on the landline, please try WhatsApp. Lastly, we share some practical tips to help your animals cope with the coming winter. Kind regards, the Wildlife Vets Namibia team

A LION'S TONGUE

If you had the rare chance of seeing a tongue of a lion, you may have wondered why they are so rough? The same principle goes for your cat at home, although a bit less extreme. When a cat licks you, the tongue feels just like the rough side of a strip of Velcro.



Close up of a lion's tongue. A lion's tongue is covered in hundreds of tiny, backward-facing hooks. © M. Bijsterbosch

The upper surface of the tongue is covered in hundreds of backward-facing, hook-shaped structures with sharp, hollow tips. These are called *filiform papillae*. These hooks are made of keratin, the same material that forms hair, fingernails and even a rhino's horn. These tiny structures turn the tongue into a highly effective hairbrush, which is capable of removing loose hair, dust, dead skin and parasites. The papillae can also be moved by muscles: when they are not needed, they lie flat against the surface of the tongue.

Lions, like all cats, are very hygienic animals, equipped with the perfect tool to thoroughly clean both themselves and their pride mates. Domestic cats may spend up to a quarter of their waking hours grooming their coat. Grooming is an important social behaviour in lions. This behaviour helps to strengthen the pride's bond, and reduces tension and stress between individuals. It can also stimulate blood circulation, and help to regulate the body temperature through the evaporation of saliva, which is evenly distributed over the entire coat through the hollow tips of the papillae.

When watching lions groom, the behaviour appears gentle, but the tongue is designed for even tougher tasks: its rough surface allows lions to scrape even the smallest bits of meat off a bone. Another function the tongue of lion is that it acts like a scoop for drinking. Cats can curl part of their tongue into a small bowl-like shape, and use the very tip to lift water into their mouths with each lap.

The tongue does not only consist of these sharp papillae. Besides the *filiform papillae* (the 'mechanical' ones), there are also *fungiform papillae*. These are rounded bumps among the sharp hooks, and contain taste buds that detect proteins and bitter compounds. At the back of the tongue are *circumvallate papillae*, which act as a final taste check before swallowing. Finally, along the side of the tongue are *foliate papillae*, which also play a role in taste perception.

RABIES ALERT

We have received some calls from farmers that rabies is doing its damaging rounds around the Dordabis and Wilhelmstal areas. If you want to understand rabies better, we would like to refer you to [our website](#). Here we have 3 articles (under the 'Diseases & Health' header) that provide lots of information. Of course you are very welcome to contact us as well.

Key points that farmers should know:

- 🐾 All mammals are susceptible for rabies, not just jackals and kudu/eland. We had several rabies cases in cows, rhino, African wild dogs, roan and even aardvark! Always be on the look-out for animals displaying strange behaviour, such as:
 - Unusual behaviour; domestic animals become wild, wild animals become tame.
 - Nervous signs; staggering, hindquarter paralysis, restless, changed tone of voice.
 - Often found near water because animals lose the ability to swallow, show excessive drooling and usually die of thirst and dehydration.
- 🐾 The most effective way of protecting kudus and eland against rabies is to dart vaccinate from the helicopter. We always strive for the highest possible percentage of the population covered by the vaccine. The time needed for this depends on the farm, the kudu/eland population and bush density. The vaccine that we use is a dead vaccine, meaning it can't cause a disease... But, it can also not cure infected animals! It is advised to vaccinate before an outbreak hits a farm (vaccinate prophylactically every 2 years when possible). Emergency vaccinations during an outbreak will usually stop an outbreak within 10-14 days following vaccination, but animals that have been infected already will die, even after vaccination.



Eland cow with typical rabies signs; drooling, bellowing, poor condition, and constantly being around water © U. Tubbesing



💡 *What to see how rabies dart vaccination gets done? Check our [YouTube video](#).*

- 🐾 Rabies is a fatal disease, there is no treatment. When you suspect an animal to have rabies, the best we can do is euthanize. When shooting a rabid animal, never shoot it in the head or upper neck if you want to brain to be tested, but rather go for the heart. When the animal is dead, remove the head from the body (be aware to wear gloves and that you don't get blood splatters in your eyes or mouth!!). **NEVER take out the brain** - this and the salivary glands is where the virus is highly concentrated! If you have small wounds/scratches on your hand, you can get infected by handling these tissues!

- 🐾 We understand it can be a mission, but we urge you have possible rabies cases tested at the Central Veterinary Lab (CVL) - Address: 24 Goethe Street, Windhoek. That way we all get a better (more scientific) idea of where rabies outbreaks occur.
 - Remove the head from the body (wear gloves!).
 - Wrap the head in newspapers to absorb body fluids.
 - Put the head in a plastic watertight bag, make sure no juices are running out.
 - Keep this bag COOL, not frozen (!), label it 'DANGER, POSSIBLE RABIES'. On our website you can download a [fillable label](#).
 - Contact your veterinarian so he/she can fill out the CVL form.
 - Take the head and the CVL form from your vet to CVL in Windhoek.
 - The test is being done for free. If there is human contact, this must be mentioned!
- 🐾 In case of human or animal contact with a rabid animal, first wash the contact site thoroughly with water and soap! After washing, contact your doctor or veterinarian right away. Preventative treatment is safe and effective, but only if started early.
- 🐾 Have your pets vaccinated against rabies on a yearly basis, and consider getting yourself vaccinated, especially if you are often in close contact with wildlife. Vaccination not only reduces the risk of developing rabies, but also simplifies post-exposure treatment, buying valuable time in emergency situations.

IMPORTANT: If you are considering rabies dart vaccination by helicopter on your farm, please coordinate with neighbouring farms. The more farms that join in, the lower the transport and ferry costs for everyone, and the more effective your kudu/eland population will be protected!

If you have noticed rabies cases on your farm (whether in livestock, kudu, eland, jackal, etc.), please send Ulf or Max a message. This helps us build a clearer picture of where rabies is spreading in Namibia, and allows us to warn farmers more effectively. Please note that we will never share farm names or owner information.

MTC ISSUES

Both Ulf and Max continue to battle with long-standing MTC network issues on their farms. We know we are probably not the only ones dealing with this, but it remains hugely frustrating. If you have any tips let us know!

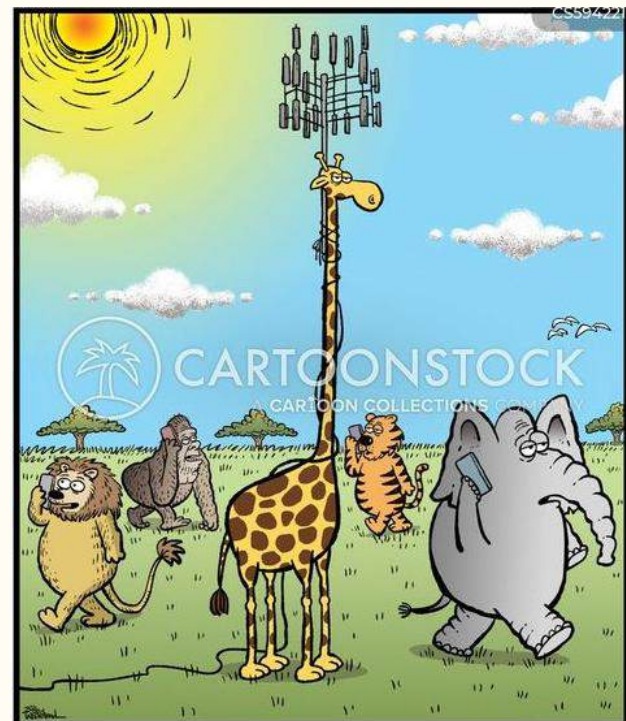
If you cannot get a hold of Ulf or Max by phone, it is definitely not because they are ignoring you 😊 Please try calling them via WhatsApp or leave a SMS message, and they will get back to you as soon as possible.

Ulf: +264 81 128 0350 Max: +264 81 760 0577

Alternatively, you can contact **Mariska: +264 81 382 8473**

We apologise for the inconvenience and thank you for your understanding.

Would this be our solution...?



THE NAMIBIAN WINTER

The winter is here! While most of us have the opportunity to warm ourselves by a heater or blanket, animals don't have that luxury. In our online article '[Animals and cold weather](#)' we explain what animals can do to protect themselves, and we provide a couple of practical tips you may consider to minimise stock losses during cold spells.

Cold winters can put serious strain on animals, especially those with little fat under the skin. Livestock generally cope better than wildlife, but severe wind and cold can still cause problems. Animals in poor body condition are most at risk, since they lack both energy reserves and insulation. Pregnant and lactating females need double the energy to stay warm, and failing to meet these needs can lead to weakness, poor milk production, or even death.

Some animals might experience frost bite. This usually affects ears and tails because the body reduces blood flow to these outer parts in order to protect vital organs. With less circulation, the tissue in these exposed areas can freeze and die off.

What you as a farmer can do to help your animals through winter is to keep them in good body condition. Animals that are thin, quickly start using up their fat reserves for energy, but fat is also an important layer of insulation. Animals in poor condition thus not only have minimal body reserves, they also have little or no physical protection against the cold.

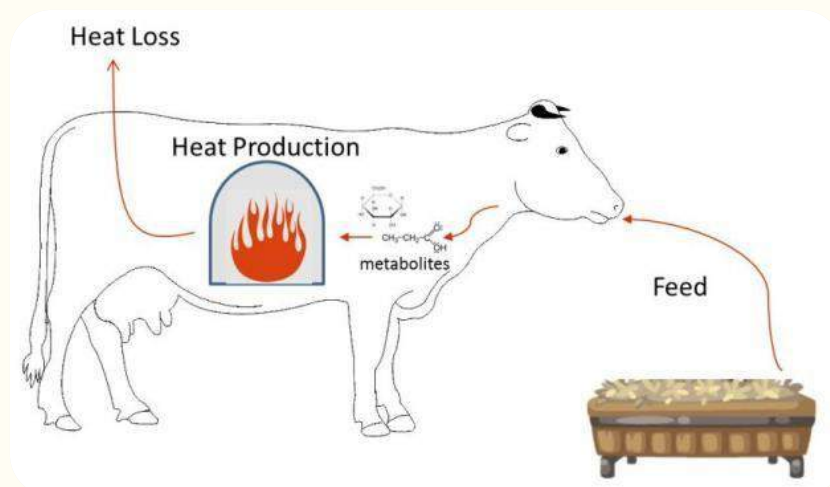
Timing of feeding matters

If you know a severe cold spell is coming, give your animals a late-afternoon meal of good quality roughage (grass/hay etc). This does more than just feed them! The fermentation process in the rumen produces heat overnight. The microbes in the rumen break down roughage, and while doing this, they release heat. The peak heat production occurs around 4 to 6 hours after feeding.

If you feed your animals early in the morning, the fermentation heat peaks around midday, when temperatures are already warm. By midnight, digestion is complete and no heat is produced. Feeding late afternoon shifts the heat peak to 22:00-02:00, when outside temperatures are lowest.

Shelter from wind

If animals can shelter from the wind it will make a big difference; these can be natural bush or even self-constructed barriers. We feel its important to avoid radical debushing where large areas are cleared! Bushes and trees provide cover and shelter against the elements; winds, cold, sun etc. Many game species hide their offspring for the first few days of life in dense bush. Browsers, especially the cold sensitive species such as kudu and nyala, are negatively affected by the reduced availability of browse as well as the lack of shelter.



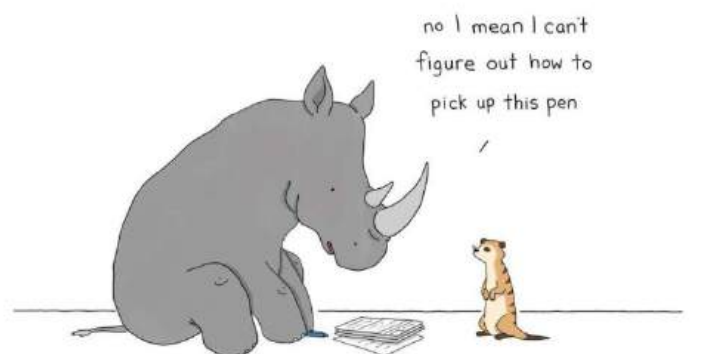
This diagram shows the process of heat production from fermentation in the cow's rumen. © [University of Florida](#)

The blackthorn (Swarthaak) is often the first bush to start greening, flowering and producing pods following winter and thus providing essential food for browsers like kudu.

For sensitive species kept in smaller camps, you can build a shelter by stacking hay bales into a maze-like structure and adding hay bedding inside. These shelters are highly effective, but especially with wild animals they must be set up early in the winter, close to feeding and drinking points. This gives the animals time to get used to the structure and feel safe entering it on cold nights. Make sure the design has several openings so animals can move in and out freely without feeling trapped.

Buy animals from areas similar to yours

When buying game, especially exotic species that naturally come from warmer, subtropical regions such as nyala, lechwe, or bushbuck, it is best to source animals from game farms where they have already been exposed to cold conditions for several generations. Within Namibia, animals from traditionally colder areas like Nina or Seeis will generally cope better if moved to places such as Tsumeb, compared to the other way around. Choosing animals with a history of cold exposure gives you a stronger chance of reducing losses during harsh winters, since they are more likely to be cold-adapted.



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