NEWSLETTER OCTOBER

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Dear clients,
We hope you are all doing well! We start this newsletter with an update on the FMD situation in Namibia. Next, we explore an unusual case that began when a client showed us photos of a pregnant duiker ewe with horns! We dug a little deeper to investigate what could explain this fascinating exception to the rules of nature. Lastly, we take you behind the scenes of our recent tsessebe translocation to Angola. Don't forget to click on the link to see the video 😊
Kind regards, the Wildlife Vets Namibia team

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE IN NAMIBIA – CURRENT SITUATION

In this article we try to give a concise update on the current FMD outbreaks in Namibia. As of 28 October 2026, the outbreaks remain confined to the reported areas. However, the response is ongoing, and farmers must remain vigilant.

//KHARAS REGION
18 farms
131 positive animals

SAT 1 confirmed on 23 September 2026. The outbreak remains within the Karasburg State Veterinary District.

The last newly infected farm was reported on 14 October. Surveillance and sampling are continuing, including a second round of inspections north of the B3.

ZAMBEZI REGION
1 area
Kalala Island

FMD confirmed on 6 October 2026. No new cases have been reported outside the designated Disease Management Area.

By 28 October, 53,913 cattle had been vaccinated at 37 crush pens within 30 km of the affected area. Movement and trade restrictions remain in force throughout the Zambezi Region.

FMD vaccination campaign

Namibia has historically maintained a recognised FMD-free zone south of the Veterinary Cordon Fence (the red line), where vaccination is not practised. This status supported access to international markets for beef and other livestock products. Vaccination in this zone can make it harder to prove that Namibia is free of FMD, because tests may not always distinguish between antibodies from vaccination and antibodies from infection.

Since 17 October 2026, emergency FMD vaccination has been underway in designated parts of the //Kharas Region in response to the current outbreak. The aim is to build immunity in cattle, reduce the risk and severity of disease, and help contain the spread of the virus. By 28 October, 7,402 cattle on 81 farms had been vaccinated by 19 teams. The target is approximately 13,000 cattle in the designated area. It is important to understand that vaccination does not replace movement restrictions, surveillance and testing! All these measures go hand in hand.

Recognize the signs of FMD

- Excessive drooling and mouth sores.
- Blisters or lesions on the tongue, lips and gums.
- Lameness or painful feet.
- Lesions around the hooves.
- Sudden drops in milk production.
- Unexplained illness or deaths, particularly in young animals.

If you suspect FMD, do not move animals onto or off your farm. Contact your State Veterinarian immediately. Isolate affected animals where safe and practical, restrict visitors and follow veterinary instructions.

Movement control and trade

Movement restrictions depend on the area, the animal or product concerned, and the applicable veterinary notification.

Before transporting any livestock, meat or animal products, check the latest DVS notification and obtain confirmation from your State Veterinarian. A general rule does not override an area-specific restriction or permit requirement.

Meat, animal products and slaughter

The 28 October update repeats that meat and animal-product movements remain subject to prescribed veterinary conditions. The following is a practical guide, not a substitute for the applicable legal notice.

✅ **Registered meat and food products**. Meat from registered abattoirs and approved facilities, cooked meat, qualifying processed meat products, pasteurised milk and treated animal products may be traded where the applicable conditions and documentation are met.

📜 **Keep supporting documents**. Retain purchase receipts and required permits, veterinary certificates and health documentation. These may be essential when transporting or selling regulated products.

❌ **Farm slaughter for commercial sale**. Commercial slaughter on farms or smallholdings in //Kharas remains prohibited under the reported restrictions until further notice. Do not sell or distribute meat from household slaughter.

📜 **Slaughter at registered abattoirs**. Animal movement is subject to prescribed biosecurity, traceability, clinical inspection and any required FMD testing. Follow the current DVS requirements before arranging transport or slaughter.

The exact permissions for raw meat, animal feed, household slaughter, exports and individual products depend on the current veterinary notifications. Confirm the conditions with DVS before moving, slaughtering or selling.

Protect your herd. Protect your neighbours. Protect Namibia's livestock industry. For more info, visit https://fmdsupportfund.com/

WILDLIFE VETS NAMIBIA

WHEN NATURE DOES NOT FOLLOW THE RULES... FEMALE DUIKER WITH HORNS!

When we try and distinguish male and female antelopes, we often look at the horns. In some species the females are hornless, while the males have horns (e.g. duiker, steenbuck, impala, waterbuck, kudu etc.). In other species both sexes have horns, although the females usually have thinner or shorter horns (e.g. wildebeest, oryx, sable, roan, eland etc.). But every now and then, nature throws us a curveball. We recently got a call from a client who shot a duiker 'ram'. When they got to it, the ram turned out to be an ewe!

Horns or no horns?

Before we delve further into this rather usual sighting, let's go back to the basics. The general conclusion is that males need their horns for fighting over females and territories. But what about females, why do females in some species have horns, and others not? Horns are costly to grow and to carry, so the females need to have a good evolutionary reason to have them. There are several possible explanations.

Kiltie, 1985 with his study "*Evolution and function of horns and hornlike organs in female ungulates"* explains that the genetic and developmental pathways in a certain species for horn growth are shared between the sexes. In other words, males and females have the same basic instructions which are needed to grow horns. What differs, is how these 'instructions' are activated, and how strongly they are expressed (e.g. females often have shorter/thinner horns). However, Kiltie also concluded that shared genetics alone does not explain why females have horns in some species but not in others. Natural selection has favoured female horns in situations where they provide a useful advantage.

Stankowich & Caro, 2009 with their study "*Evolution of weaponry in female bovids*" argue that horn development in female bovids[1] is strongly influenced by the need to defend themselves. Large-bodied species, and those who live in open habitats such as savannas and grasslands, are more likely to have horned females. In these cases, camouflage is not much of an option, so the females need to be able to defend themselves against predators. A female wildebeest, for example, is a large antelope living on open plains and her horns are a useful weapon against predators. A small antelope like a duiker or steenbuck can rely on camouflage and dense vegetation, and therefore has less benefit from having horns.

While most studies, like the one above, focussed on the function of the horns in females, a more recent study from Lopez & Stankowich (2026) *"Territoriality, sociality and male weaponry shape horn investment in female bovids"* looked at the ecological and social factors that could explain horn variation. They found that horn presence in females was correlated with female territoriality. Females of species that defend their territory against other females are more likely to have horns. They also argued that shorter or thinner horns (compared to males) are a cost-benefit trade-off. The females need enough weaponry to fight of another female, but at the same time, growing big horns costs energy and can interfere with movement. Their conclusion is that female horns evolved mainly because females compete with each other, and because social living creates pressure to invest in weaponry. Protecting against predators plays a smaller part than older studies suggested.

[1] family of cloven-hoofed mammals, includes cattle, sheep, goats, antelopes, buffalo etc.

In summary, we can assume that female horns appear to be shaped by a combination of defence against predators, territorial defence, and competition with other females. Body size, habitat openness, predation risk, female territoriality and social behaviour all appear to contribute to whether a female has horns or not.

Now let's go back to the species where females usually do not have horns, and suddenly they have!

Female duiker with horns

We received these photos from a client in the Omaruru district. A hunter had shot what appeared to be a duiker ram, but on closer inspection the animal had female genitalia, and on top of that, she was even pregnant!

A duiker ewe with horns. ©Roy van der Merwe

In Namibia we have the common duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*), also known as the grey or bush duiker. Normally, the males are females are told apart by their horns; rams have horns, ewes not. But, as the photos above showed, this is not always the case!

Deon Furstenburg mentions in "*Fokus op die gewone / Grysduiker (Sylvicapra grimmia) S A Hunter 11022:38-41*", that during culling operations in the Eastern Cape between 1988 and 1999, 18% of the 400 ewes that were culled had small horns, of up to 3.5 cm long. Occasionally longer horns were reported, but they would be very thin and deformed. Since the 18% figure is from a particular population, we would not say you could extrapolate this to Namibia or other areas. A duiker ewe with horns is a very intresting find, but not nessecarily rare. However, the fact that this particular female has long, well developed horns, is unusual.

In a way it would make sense for duiker females to have horns, since they are territorial. Horns could help them defend their territory against other females. In other duiker species the females do have horns.

Kudu female with horns

Then we have another interesting case from Annette Oelofse from Mount Etjo Safari Lodge. She has observed a kudu cow with horns. She was seen usually amongst a cow and calf herd. It is not certain is ever had a calf herself.

There is not much literature on kudu females with horns that we could find. Lydekker, R. (1908) *"The Game Animals of Africa (page 348)"* writes that female kudus occasionally develop horns, however they are more or less deformed and have a closer spiral than those of males. This coincides with the kudu cow with horns on Mount Etjo as you can see in the photos.

A kudu cow with horns on Mount Etjo Safari Lodge. © Annette Oelofse

Impala ewe with horns

Already in 1935, Boje Benzon wrote about an impala ewe with horns in *A horned female impala. The Field (London) 166(4307): 92*. Unfortunately we could not access the article.

There also has been an interesting case in Londolozi Game Reserve (inside Sabi Sand Game Reserve, SA). The impala ewe with horns was first observed in 2018; she lacked male genitalia and developed unusual horns. Based on the 2024 photos you can see her horns grew quite a lot! They mention that she interacts with the herd as a normal impala ewe, however after the rutting period she would be observed more in the bachelor herd.

An impala ewe with horns in Londolozi Game Reserve. © The photo on the left was taken in 2018 by field guide James Souchon, the photo on the right was taken in 2024 by Sean Zeederberg.

Conclusion

So, why does a female of a normally hornless species sometimes grow horns? The honest answer is… we do not really know.

What we do know is that the genetic and developmental traits needed for horn growth is still present in females. In most females of normally hornless species, the mechanisms that trigger horn development are suppressed, or are only expressed weakly. In the individual animals we described, something may have caused these pathways to be expressed more strongly, resulting in the development/growth of horns.

One possible explanation is hormonal influence. Certain androgens (group of sex hormones that includes testosterone) can influence horn growth. However, it is not as simple as saying 'the more testosterone, the bigger the horns'. In some bovid species, horn growth is actually greatest when sex hormones are low, and slows down once the animal has reached sexual maturity. The relationship between hormones and horn development is complex, and varies between species and stages of development.

Another possibility is genetic variation. A horned female does not necessarily have a genetic abnormality or mutation. Instead, she may simply have a genetic variant that allows the horn-development pathways to be expressed more strongly than usual. If similar cases occur repeatedly within the same population (think of the 18% duiker females with horns in the Eastern Cape), it could be that the population has a genetic predisposition for female horn development. One would need genetic studies to confirm.

It is also important to remember that a single unusual individual does not mean the species is evolving in a new direction. Female horns may offer advantages in some species or populations, but the occasional horned female in a hornless species is just a natural variation that is present within that species.

The females above are not breaking the Nature's rules, they are just an unusual expression of the biological variation that those rules allow.

TSESSEBE TRANSLOCATION

Last month (before the FMD outbreak) we translocated 10 tsessebe antelopes from a Namibian game farm to a private game reserve in Angola. This is conservation at its best: moving wildlife from areas where populations are doing well, to suitable areas where they will thrive and help restore a more natural balance. In this article, we take you behind the scenes of this exciting journey!

We started early in the morning with the capture. First, we dart immobilized 2 cows and a big bull from one herd, and brought them to our game truck. Tsessebes are actually really nice animals to work with. Once the immobilising drugs start to take effect, they often remain standing (unlike most antelopes who become recumbent). We can then hold them by the horns and walk them to the car!

Walking a dog? Nah, no challenge! Lets walk a Tsessebe © M. Bijsterbosch

Once loaded, the tsessebes received multivitamins, deworming treatment and an anti-tick pour-on. In the dart is a long-acting tranquilizer mixed with the immobilization drugs. This will help to keep the animals calm for about 3 to 5 days, and it enhances appetite during the trip. We had all compartments loaded with lots of grass and some lucerne. We then headed out to find the second herd, where we darted another two cows and five youngsters. The adults were loaded separately, while the youngsters travelled together. To help prevent injuries, we placed small protective caps over the tips of their horns. These will eventually come off naturally as the animals move around in the bush.

By late morning, we were already on the road! Fortunately, the weather was cool and overcast, making conditions ideal for the long journey. We stopped several times along the way to check on the animals and arrived in Oshikango at around 23:00.

The following morning, we crossed the border into Angola. Border crossings can be stressful, as the process often takes several hours. It was very hot, and eventually we left the Angolan border just before 14:00. Quite soon we again had nice overcast weather, and even a little drizzle. We drove past impressive baobab trees and saw plenty of cattle and other livestock, many were in good condition. It was great to see water still available in several areas along the route.

The roads varied from good to... well, not so good! 😉 We reached the turn-off to the reserve at around 18:00, with the final 60 km of thick sandy road still ahead of us. Fortunately, Frederick and our trusted Mercedes-Benz truck handled this challenge like champions!

Tsessebes on the road, and the last sand stretch! © M. Bijsterbosch

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Tsessebes in the pre-release boma © M. Bijsterbosch

At around 22:00, we finally reached the pre-release boma. This is a secure enclosure where the animals can rest, recover from their journey and easily access food and water before being released. It also allows them to regroup and settle down together in their new surroundings. Read more about pre-release bomas here: Pre-Release Boma.

The next morning we checked on the tsessebes. All 10 were together and looking relaxed, so the decision was made to open the gate that very afternoon!

Since their release, we have received several videos showing the tsessebes exploring their new home. They seem to have settled in beautifully, calmly walking past vehicles without showing much concern. Although animal translocations are always stressful (not just for the animals but for sure also for us!), seeing the animals relaxed, together and adapting well to their new home is the best reward of all!

Curious to see the entire trip? Check out our YouTube video!

Yes, your blood work is not good!
Going after the weak, sick or old
is not conducive to eating well now, is it?

Dr Ulf Tubbesing
ulf@wildlifevetsnamibia.com
+264 81 128 0350

Dr Maximilian Krings
max@wildlifevetsnamibia.com
+264 81 760 0577

Mariska Bijsterbosch
mariska@wildlifevetsnamibia.com
+264 81 382 8473 / +316 43693095

Kayleigh Miller
kayleigh@wildlifevetsnamibia.com
+264 81 421 8242

Facebook:
Wildlife Vets Namibia

Instagram:
@wildlife_vets_namibia

YouTube:
Wildlife Vets Namibia

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