



RESERVE REPORT

April 2017

Introduction

The most striking activity during the reporting period has been a sudden influx of thousands upon thousands of Red-billed queleas (*Quelea quelea*). To describe their numbers and activities in words is almost impossible. It is a show of natural wonder in the skies that only eye witnesses might truly appreciate.

In the previous Reserve Report, I drew attention to the abundant biomass of grass seeds this season, suggesting perhaps Nature's way of re-establishing its resources to recover from a stressed period of drought? Well the Red-billed queleas are literally making hay while the sun shines. There are massive flocks of these little seed eating birds all over, flying together in their thousands in tight formation, their collective wing flapping best described as the sound of slow flowing water.



Red-billed queleas flocking at dusk

Red-billed queleas belong to the weaver family, occurs sub-Saharan Africa, and considered to be the most abundant wild bird species globally. Population estimates are in the billions. The IUCN conservation status categorises the quelea as "least concern".

Given their sheer numbers, and their diet preference of seeds, it is little wonder that they are attracted to the cultivated lands of grain and cereal farmers and can cause large scale destruction to standing crops. Classified in agriculture as pest, and because they are prolific breeders, man has struggled to make an impact on population numbers of Red-billed queleas. Their feeding habits have aided maintaining their massive numbers.

Red-billed queleas are nomadic and capable of migrating large distances to suitable feeding grounds and may breed as many as three times per year. During breeding cycles, the males develop a bright red bill with plumage becoming more colourful from the standard light brown form. Female bill colour changes to dull yellow when breeding, from the usual

red. Queleas are monogamous breeders. Usually 2 – 4 eggs are laid. Incubation is 10 to 12 days. Chicks are fledged about 12 days later.



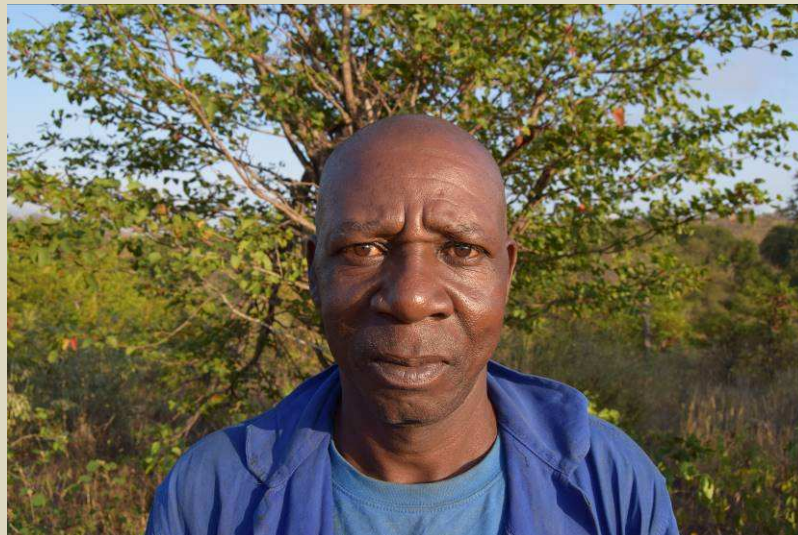
Red-billed queleas en-mass in Ingwelala skies

Diet also consists of insects such as bugs, beetles, dragonflies, crickets, termites and ants. These are taken in the air or hunted from perches.

The main predators of adult quelea are falcons, storks and herons and at water points terrapins and crocodiles feed on them. A myriad of predators feed on quelea chicks and fledglings ranging from raptors to vultures to storks to snakes and to rock monitors.

Facts researched on the Internet, words by John Llewellyn. Pictures courtesy of Charlie Lynam.

Staff profile (Meet the team):



Alfret Namane

Alfret Namane was born on 10 October 1956. His family home was in Bushbuckridge, and is one of six children, having three brothers and two sisters.

On 12 November 1997, at 41 years of age, Alfret joined the Ingwelala Team as a tractor driver, a position he still holds today. Alfret is married and he and his family live in Acornhoek. He has six children, the oldest daughter is 24, who is employed as a packer on a citrus farm in Hoedspruit.

A massive part of Alfret's job in the conservation team is road maintenance, and he is a true wizard with the tractor and blade. Tasks include servicing all the mitre drains which means selecting drain alignment to direct water run-off, cutting the mitre drains and recovering excess and washed soil back onto the road surface. The drainage humps in the road are all constructed using the tractor and blade. Over time with all the game viewers aiding compaction on the road surface the camber is influenced, and again Alfret attends to this and can shape the camber with a blade. The cosmetic action of dragging tyres over the road surface to smooth over all the bumps and ripples is the easy part! Thank you Alfret, for the fantastic work you do on the roads.



Alfret clearing Dando flood debris in January 2012

In questioning Alfret about life and work on Ingwelala, he explained that a buffalo is his favourite animal, because it is less aggressive than an elephant. A buffalo will observe you and then move away, whereas you can never be sure what an elephant will decide to do next. In all his years working in the field, he smiled broadly and informed me he has never had a close encounter with a dangerous animal or venomous snake for that matter. Work wise he wishes that all the staff can be healthy and strong to undertake their tasks efficiently and enjoy their work. Alfret also wishes that staff retiring from Ingwelala have sufficient pension funds for quality lives.

On a sporting note Alfret coaches and manages the staff football team, and is a great fan of Kaizer Chiefs.

Annual Safari Challenge:

The annual Safari Challenge was enthusiastically greeted by the contestants on the Saturday of the Easter weekend. This year the challenge was made even more special, and difficult, because the Nhlalalumi was in full flow when contestants assembled at the start. There was tangible hype and excitement in the air, huge anticipation of events to come. Ntsiri had kindly offered to host a portion of the route, but this leg was unfortunately cancelled before the start for logistical reasons. However, as water levels subsided during the day, contestants were invited by Ntsiri to sample this route after the event prize giving took place. Thank you Ntsiri, and especially to Mark Griffiths for his time spent with event organisers prior to the big day.

Studying the 2017 challenge sheet, the environmental and biological questions require some knowledge and thinking about, and this is hugely educational for those who love the bush and wish to learn more about Mother Nature.



Thank you to John and Des Fuller in Bungalow # 42 and all their course marshals for their tireless efforts, detailed planning and incredible organising to coordinate an enjoyable outing. Thank you to all the contestants and congratulations to Ingwelala Bungalow # 135 who took top honours!

The Safari Challenge article will appear in the June 2017 edition of the 'Leisure Wheels' magazine; it will be available in most shops from the third week of this month (May 2017).

Thank you so much to all the sponsors were incredibly generous and are listed as follows:

Bridgestone S.A. – Guthrie Blaine – a set of Firestone Wilderness tyres for 1st prize overall.

Leisure Wheels – Danie Botha – Sponsoring a full article, plus filming. Filming will appear on Ignition TV in September.

Briza Publications – Elsa and Gwen.

Chrinica – Joanne – Bungalow 58.

Belgrow Trees & Nursery – Paul Da Luca.

Parliament Restaurant – Shayne Holt.

Coalition Pizza Experience – Shayne Holt.

Nandos – Mark Radomsky.

Pick 'n Pay – Hoedspruit – Natasha.

Mimosa Technologies (Pty) Ltd – Rulene.

Venture Plastics – Geoff Watson – Bungalow 97.

PDA Solutions - Tree & Bird Apps – Dianne.

Cedar Solar – Anton.

Hawker family – Bungalow 39.

Other;

Adriaan and Sonet Genis – printing, laminating and general overall planning.

Retief and Desire – photos – Bungalow 86.

The marshal team of 10. Also, the recovery team under Mark Shaw.

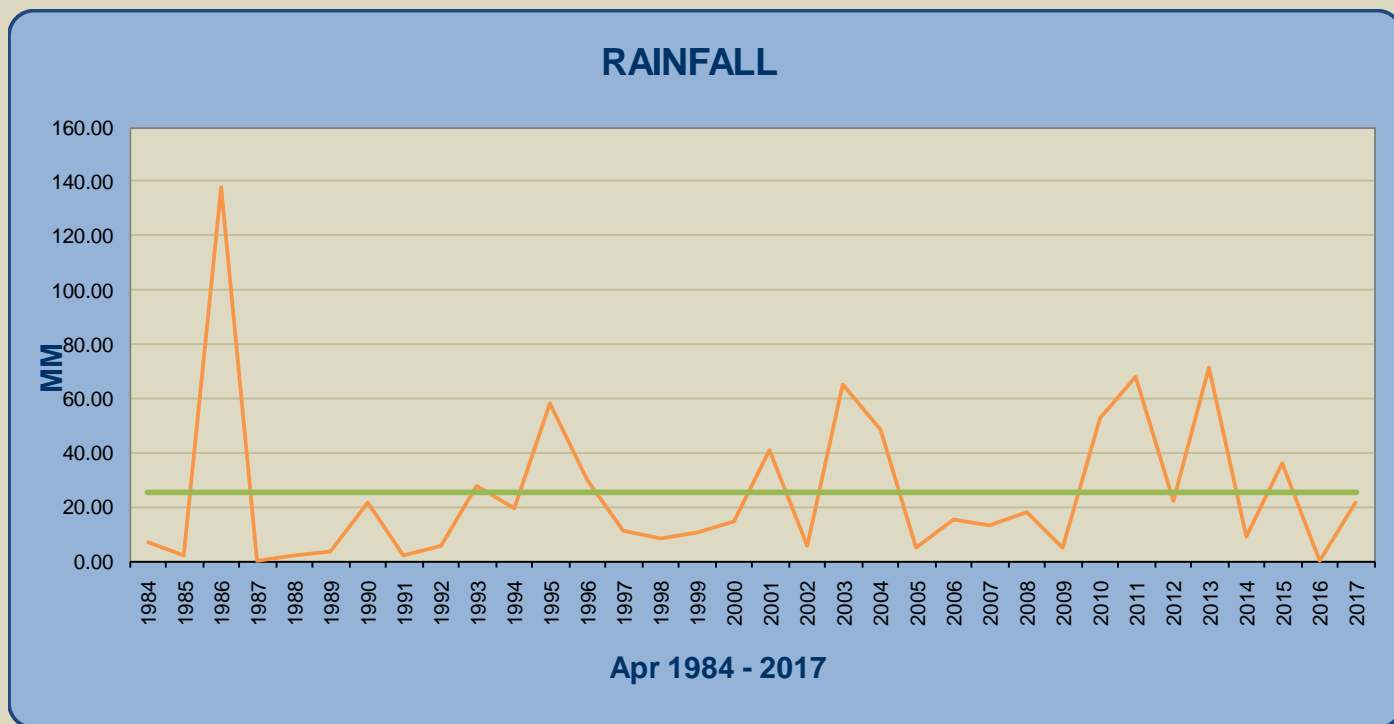
Ingwelala Board and Staff, the whole fine team.



Climate and rainfall (summary)

Rainfall: 21.2 mm: Season Total = 389.1 mm.
Minimum temperature: 13 degrees Celsius.
Maximum temperature: 35 degrees Celsius.

The following graph summarises total rainfall recorded at Ingwelala for the month of April over the past 33 years.



(Note: April 2017: 21.2 mm rainfall is less than monthly average of 25.2 mm)

Staff complement

Reserve Manager (1)
Conservation Manager and 2iC (1)
Camp and Systems Manageress (1)
Front Desk Manageress (1)
Accounts Manageress (1)
Workshop Manager (1)
Maintenance Manager (1)
Reception and Housekeeping (1)
Field Assistants (5)
Grounds staff (2)
Domestics (14)
Maintenance Assistants (4)
Workshop Assistants (4)
Petrol and Stores Attendant (1)
Shop assistants (2)
Sibon (2)

Staff Movement

One Field Assistant in conservation resigned.

Bungalows for sale

Bungalow # 18, a full (100%) share of seven shares for R4.90 million.

Conservation

Alien plant eradication

Conservation staff treated 30 Opuntia (prickly pear) with herbicide on Buffelsbed.

Veld Rehabilitation

A total of six hectares of selective bush thinning (Grewia spp) has been cleared between River Road and Route 1 on Argyle.

A further two hectares of Mopane was cleared on the identified trial site on Goedehoop, this brings the total area cleared so far to four hectares. This selective clearing is a trial site in Mopane Woodland to monitor the effects of woody/grass competition. It is hoped that natural grass swards can be re-established in these woodland areas as part of the long-term veld rehabilitation.

Grewia spp. clearing commenced on Buffelsbed in the block between Eastern River Road and Mopani Drive. This also includes very selective mopane clearing.

In the Lowveld Grewia spp. (raisin bush) is considered an indigenous problem plant. It grows prolifically under ideal environmental conditions that favour the plant. This is apparent in our general area since the 2012 floods. Traditionally Ingwelala has cleared Grewia by means of a string of chain attached to a tractor and the trailing end of the chain is wrapped around the base of the plant and the tractor then pulls the plant out. The field assistant then unwraps the chain and selects a new plant. This practice is limited to the rainy season when the soils are soft enough to ensure that most of the roots are extracted with the plant. As soil conditions get drier, the roots snap off and this leads to plant coppice needing follow up treatment, either by pulling the next season or foliage spray with herbicide. In a good month, we probably manage five hectares of clearing at most.

“Bush Thinning Solutions” is the service provider/contractor Ingwelala has sourced. Remember that in the conservation industry there are service providers who specialise in bush thinning. Bush Thinning Solutions designed a machine that is easily transportable, easily operated, highly robust and highly manoeuvrable to tackle the task of bush thinning or bush clearing. Bush thinning tends to be selective, whereas bush clearing is non-selective.

The machine itself is designed to have a large circular saw that cuts the plant off about 80mm above natural ground level. Its three-wheel design makes it highly manoeuvrable. Its steel frames and welded mesh frames protect the operator from protruding branches.



Specialised cutting machine in action on Buffelsbed

Depending on plant density and thinning vs clearing, it can clear as much as 10 hectares in a day. Two field assistants track the machine and spray herbicide onto the cut stumps left behind. This is known as “cut stump treatment”. A dye

is used in the herbicide mix so the field assistants can see which stumps have been treated to avoid duplication. The herbicide used is called Access, and an agent called Actipron is added to the mix to aid absorption.

Follow up treatment occurs in the next growth season when the thinned/cleared sites are inspected/monitored for any sign of coppice from the roots that remained after initial treatment. You seldom, if ever, achieve 100% kill rate from initial treatment therefore follow treatments are necessary. This coppice is then sprayed/treated and is known as "foliar spray treatment".

This veld rehabilitation is undertaken with the objective of reducing these dense stands and promoting a better mix of woodies and grass swards, which in turn maintains a higher level of biodiversity.

Erosion Control

Minor erosion control work carried out at The Platform to slow down water run-off.

Roads and Tracks

60% of mitre drains were serviced on Argyle.

75% of the roads on Goedehoop and 10% of the roads on Buffelsbed were attended to, either shaped with a grader blade or dragged with tractor and tyre.

All river crossings were graded and repaired after the Nhlalalumi River flowed on 15 April 2017.

Encroaching vegetation on the road verges along Umbabat Road was cleared.

Airstrip

The airstrip surface is inspected on a weekly basis and the general condition recorded in a register.

A reminder please that all airstrip users must complete (once off) an ***Ingwelala Airstrip Indemnity Form*** before landing. Indemnity forms are obtainable from reception@ingwelala.co.za Guest pilots must also complete the form before using the airstrip.

Fencing

All the fences are working within the APNR Protocol and Norms and Standards.

There were six breaches by elephants to the Camp fence, interesting to observe that four of these breaches took place over the busy Easter weekend and one over the long weekend at month end. The high camp occupancy with people presence seemed to not deter the elephants in any way.

Regular maintenance was carried out on the various camp fences throughout the month.

Bomas, Hides and Picnic Sites

These facilities are checked daily.

Picnic tables and benches were repainted ahead of the busy periods. Grass was slashed at these facilities.

Game sightings

The camp had high occupancy rates throughout April, and it is always pleasing to read through all the wonderful sightings that are posted in the sightings register in Reception. Thank you for taking the time to record these sightings.

Lions were seen almost every day, in various numbers, shapes and sizes. There was an eye witness report of a clash between different aged cubs of two lionesses, where 8-week old cubs of the one lioness tormented and killed a newly born cub of another lioness. When trying to understand or interpret this behaviour it raises more questions than answers. An adult male lion, in pitiful body condition, was euthenased after it sought refuge in Vuka Ingwe. The post mortem confirmed the lion was riddled with TB in its lymph nodes and showed chronic arthritis in the joints. Blood and tissue samples were collected for further analysis, the Vets suspecting too the lion was infected with Feline AIDS.

Other Big Five sightings were also plentiful, with numerous breeding herds of elephants seen, on the hotter days those ranging on Argyle enjoy bathing in the river at Farmhouse. Buffalo and leopards were seen often, with two different pairs of mating leopards a certain highlight (Old Farmhouse and Mansimvula Cutline).

Wild dogs were active along the tar road early mornings, pack sizes varying from 7 – 15.

General game sightings included giraffe, blue wildebeest, zebra, impala, kudu, nyala, grey duiker, steenbok, spotted hyena, spring hare, porcupine, hippo, African wild cat, genet, civet and crocodile. It's encouraging to see the spring hare numbers are building up rather pleasingly.

Birds listed were Martial Eagle, African Hawk Eagle, Fish Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Ground Hornbill, Black Stork, Hooded Vulture, Hamerkop, Kori Bustard, Cisticola and even an Osprey seen at Timbavati Crossing.

The annual impala rutting season is in full swing.

Security

An adult kudu cow was euthenased on Buffelsbed following deep tissue and joint damage from a snare.



Road Kills

X2 Nightjars.

X1 Natal Spurfowl

X1 Snake (beyond identification).

General Fire Risk Management

Despite the late rains, veld fire risk will be steadily increasing as the autumn veld begins to dry out.

Fire-fighting equipment is checked on a weekly basis.

Two tractors available to assist with fire-fighting (x2 water drawn carts).

X1 "Bakkie-Sakkie" serviceable and responsive on a "first call" basis.

X1 250-litre water cart and pump available for "fast response", back up to "Bakkie-Sakkie".

X 20 fire beaters and x4 knap-sack sprays in good working order.

Firebreak preparation around bungalows and infrastructure in camp has commenced and is 50% complete.

Umbabat

One incursion (suspected poachers) into the Umbabat, without any poaching success.

One APNR Management Meeting attended by the Chairs and Warden.

One Nkorho Exco Meeting and one Nkorho Wardens Committee Meeting held during April.

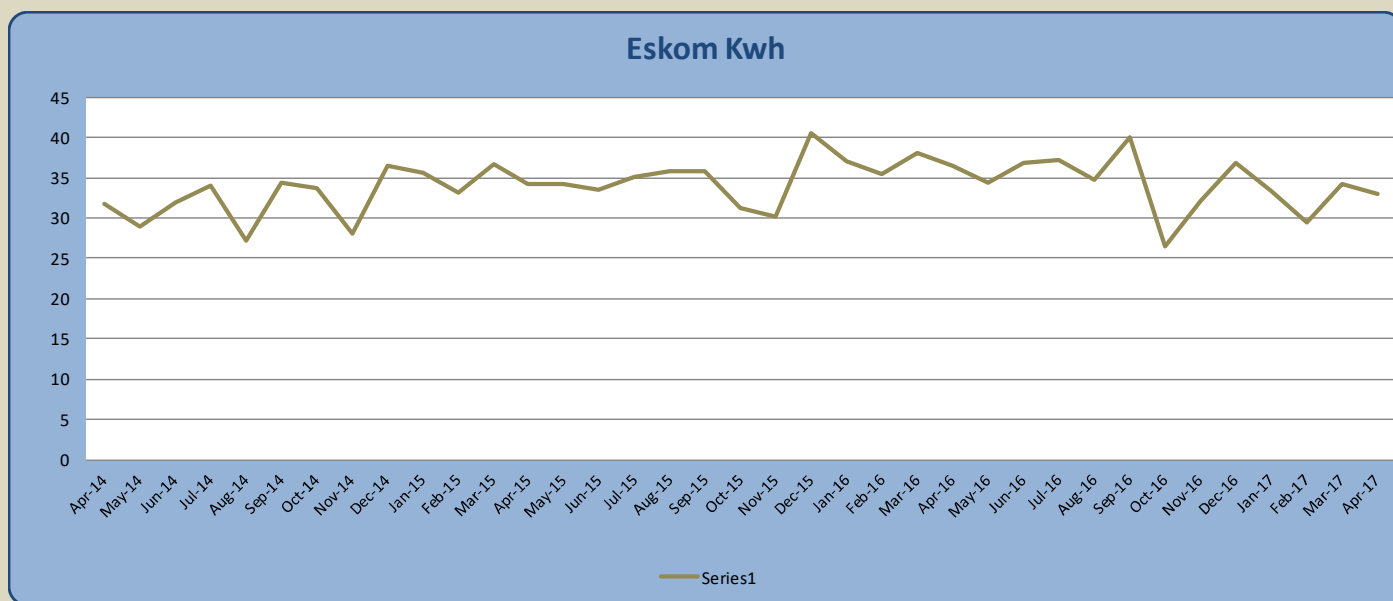
Water reticulation

Yield data for the boreholes is reflected in the following table, comparative with previous months.

BOREHOLE	APR 17	MAR 17	FEB 17	JAN 17	DEC 16	NOV 16	OCT 16	SEP 16	AUG 16	JUL 16	JUN 16
BH NO 1	188	87	97	1095	175	53	106	283	153	165	0
BH NO 2	1141	1005	669	949	883	814	642	921	590	603	382
BH NO 3	681	342	683	193	320	473	518	834	575	721	343
BH NO 4	425	322	753	812	884	911	894	855	832	772	801
BH NO 5	445	353	245	345	392	470	446	473	462	320	477
BH NO 6	622	683	107	650	690	394	586	593	709	553	662
BH NO 7	0	0	2	288	207	455	565	425	232	165	434
BH NO 9	Solar	Solar	Solar	Solar	Solar	Solar	Solar	Solar	Solar	Solar	Solar
JB	43	0	0	0	0	0	0	111	329	285	345
GOEDEHOOP	780	0	0	0	507	870	762	753	1018	825	774

Eskom Usage

The following graph shows the monthly Eskom Usage (Kwh) for Ingwelala.



Vehicles and Workshop

WORKSHOP	APR 17	MAR 17	FEB 17	JAN 17	DEC 16	NOV 16	OCT 16	SEP 16	AUG 16	JUL 16
JOB CARDS OPENED	46	55	38	37	53	39	43	51	51	63
JOB CARDS CLOSED	57	56	30	19	56	42	45	49	55	56
GENERATOR HOURS	10.9	0	2.1	3.8	13.7	2.4	6.8	11.7	0	8.2
DIESEL TANK (L)	650	850	850	100	205	425	475	550	700	700

The general fleet and static plant maintenance is 100% compliant with the servicing schedule.

Mercedes Vito awaiting a new starter motor.

Toyota Dyna (C2) and "water" Hilux (C1) to be replaced before end June.

Building project

Current (major) building projects are listed below:

Bung No	Name	Work requested	Approval	Builder	% Complete
115	Phil Raymond	Internal modifications	November 2016	Dukes Construction	0%
116	Geoff Watson	Demolish and rebuild	February 2017	Chameleon	15%
173	Theo van der Handel	Rethatch & internal upgrades	April 2017	Chameleon	10%
185	Weston Dickson	Demolish and rebuild	Approved January 2017	Chameleon	8%
186	John Hawkins	New gazebo and raise patio	Approved July 2016	Dukes Construction	70%

Reception Statistics

GATE STATISTICS	APR 17	MAR 17	FEB 17	JAN 17	DEC 16	NOV 16	OCT 16	SEP 16	AUG 16	JUL 16
VEHICLES	397	245	145	179	458	185	218	256	338	307
MEMBERS GUESTS	1328	798	437	481	1341	614	609	689	1013	1033
UNACCOMP GUESTS	34	0	8	0	0	2	0	3	0	0
UNITS OCCUPIED	222	140	91	159	213	113	138	143	167	179
AIRBORNE VISITORS	17	3	7	8	2	7	11	8	3	19

COTTAGE NIGHTS	APR 17	MAR 17	FEB 17	JAN 17	DEC 16	NOV 16	OCT 16	SEP 16	AUG 16	JUL 16
HORNBILL	28	20	20	13	18	12	9	3	14	12
FRANCOLIN	19	13	10	8	18	9	8	10	14	24
GUINEAFOWL	17	4	9	11	7*	0	3	5	14	18

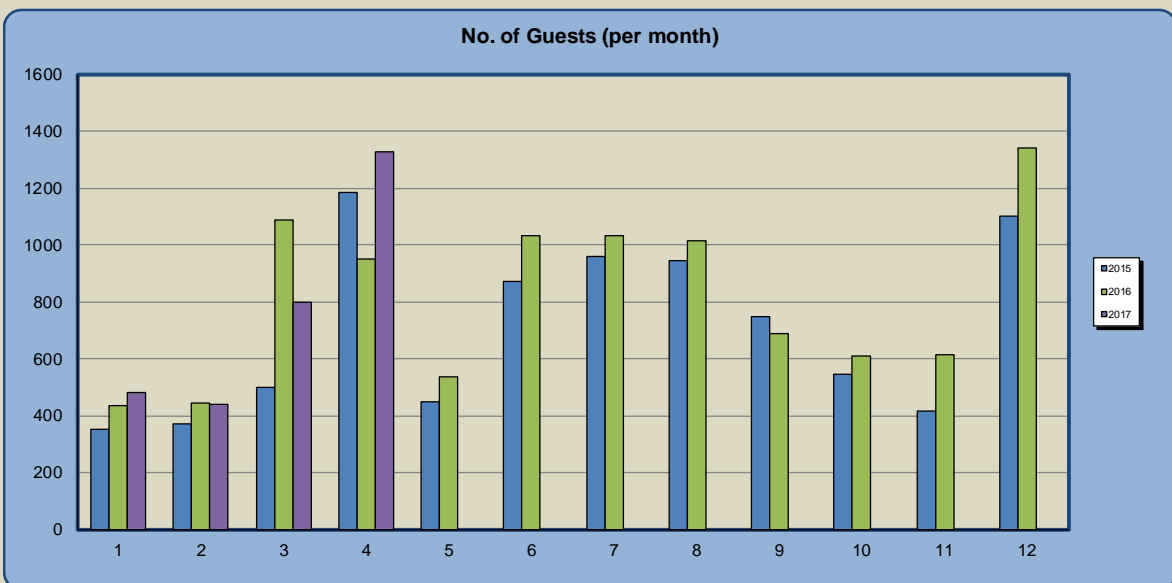
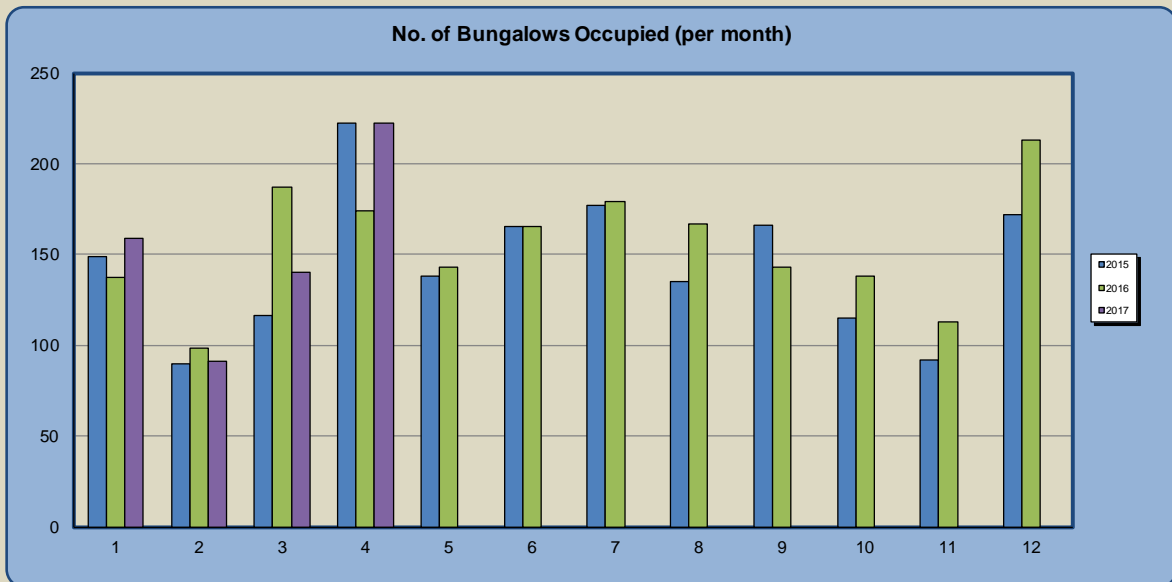
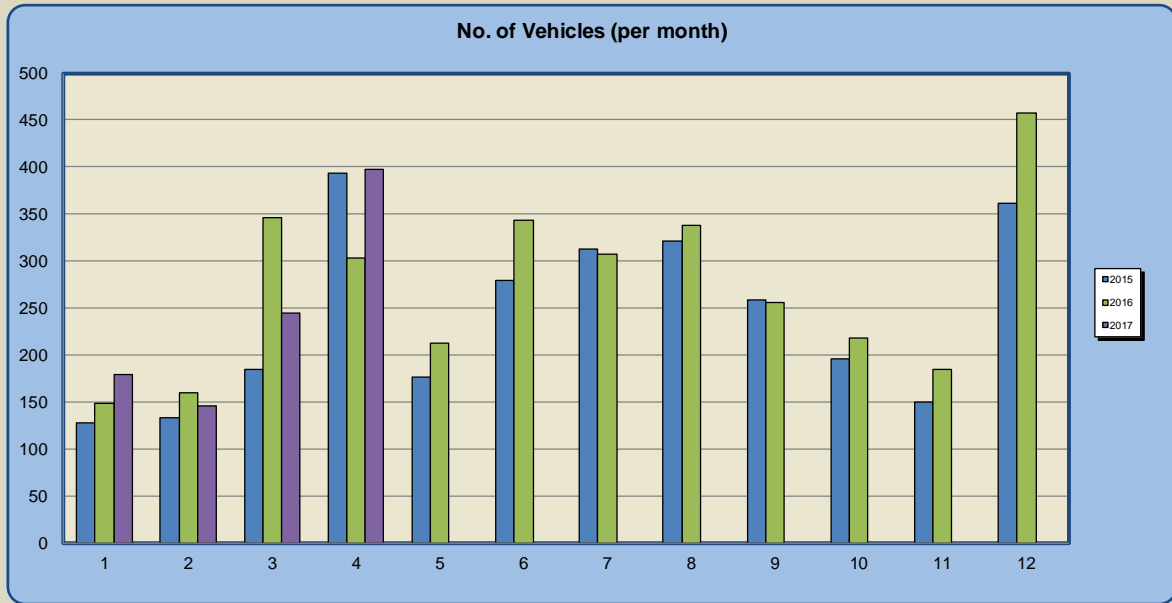
General:

1. The next Members Information Evening is scheduled for Thursday 08 June, at Bryanston Country Club, for an 18h00 start. Johan Marias, a world-renowned herpetologist and snake expert, will be the guest speaker.

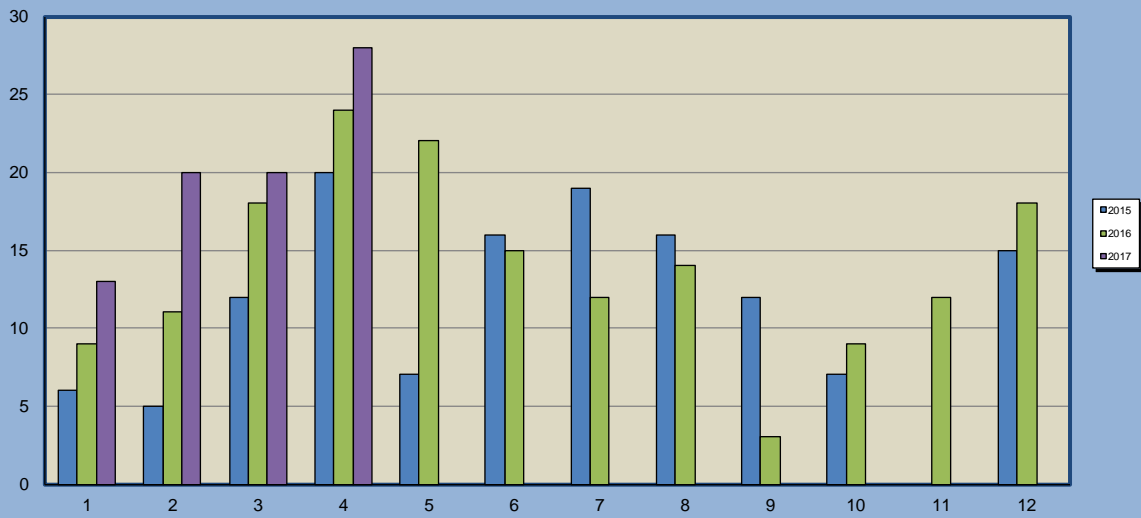
Thank you for your continued support.

John Llewellyn
Reserve Manager

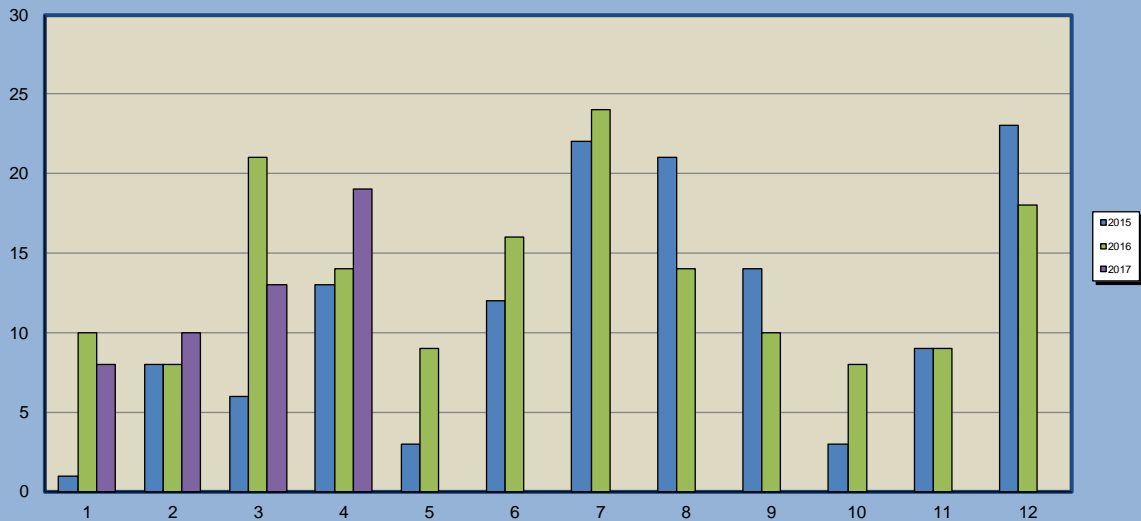
ANNEXURE1: GRAPHS



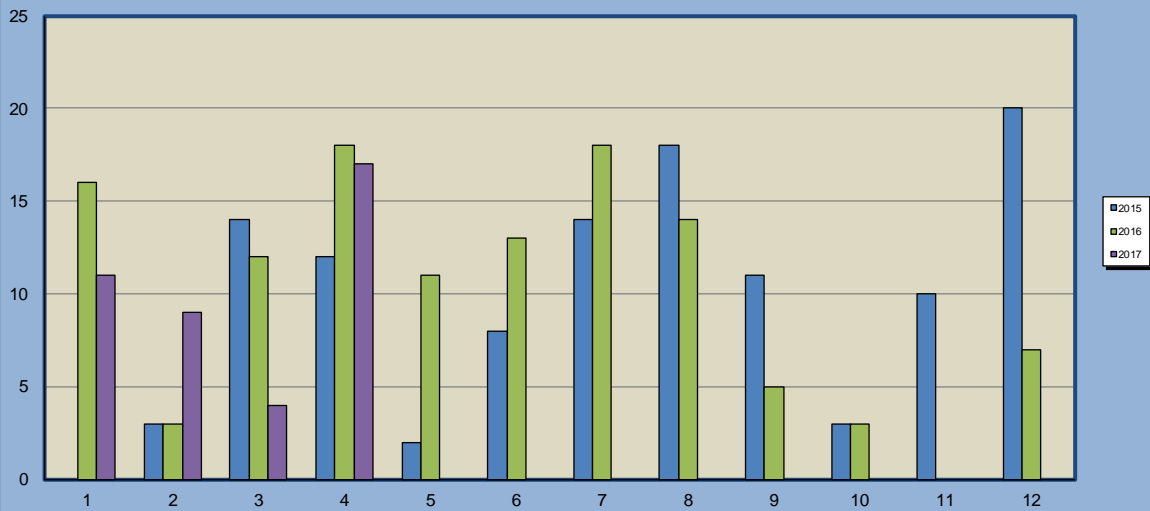
Hornbill Occupancy (nights per month)



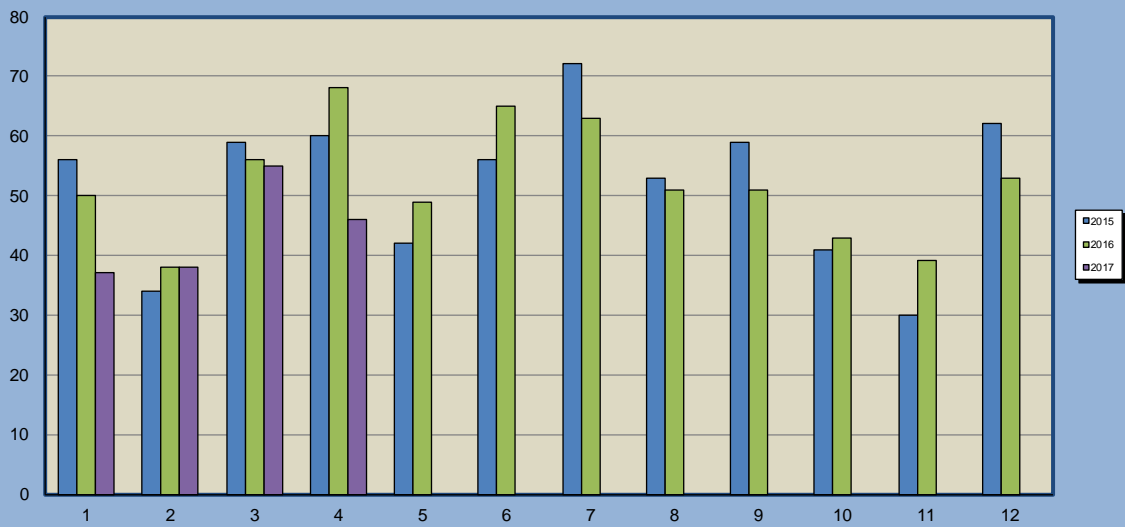
Francolin Occupancy (nights per month)



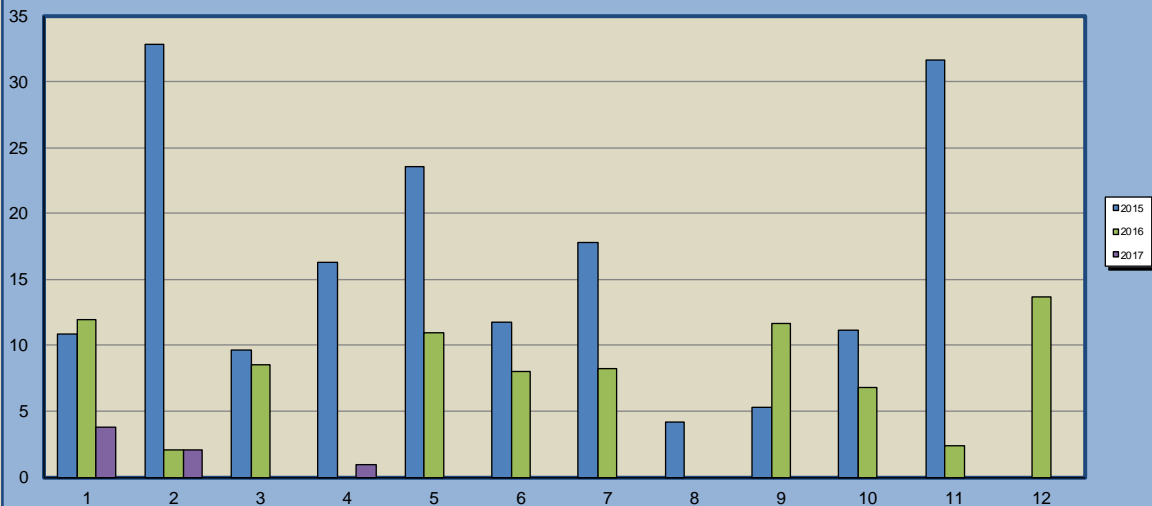
Guineafowl Occupancy (nights per month)



No. of job cards opened (per month)



Generator Hours (per month)



Ground Water Extraction m³
(combined boreholes per month)

