



# Annual Report 2023

# Animals on the Reserve

Species	Dec 2022	Dec 2023	Highest number recorded in a game count this year
Blesbok	88	44	93
Common Reedbuck	13	10	16
Duiker	12	33	40
Eland	124	112	123
Giraffe	38	40	46
Impala	465	360	360
Kudu	561	323	323
Mountain Reedbuck	23	17	33
Nyala	75	50	50
Red Haartbeest	73	57	57
Warthog	344	212	212
Waterbuck	66	66	66
Wildebeest	269	351	351
Zebra	481	551	551
<b>Total</b>	<b>2632</b>	<b>2226</b>	<b>2321</b>

## Top Events

There were 2 exciting events this year, one of which was the introduction of 16 buffalo - It is hoped this will eventually make a huge difference to the grassland. They seem to have decided Ithala is the place for them and hopefully they will move around more during the winter looking for juicier grass!

The ostrich parents lost all the chicks in early 2023, they had another 10 chicks, of which 3 have been spotted.

In 2024, a list will be put together of animals to take off and animals to bring in so as to stay well within UmPhafa's carrying capacity - the animals taken off will include zebra, kudu and wildebeest bulls.



Buffalo



Leopard



Ostrich

# Animals on the Reserve

## GAME COUNTS

Despite having an increase in figures in 2022 of 500 animals on the Reserve, 2023 has seen a reduction of 400 animals. We know this is partly due to losing a lot of the elderly, sick animals in the 4th quarter – with little rain there was not much nourishment as the rains were delayed, only starting properly in November.

Even with the use of an increased number of licks, we were getting to the stage of considering the purchase of hay bales. Luckily the rain came eventually in November. The number of babies recorded is considerably less as the animals seem to wait for better conditions. The wildebeest and impala only gave birth after Christmas – maybe they knew something we didn't!

MONTH	COUNT
Dec 2022	2648
Jan 2023	2081
Feb 2023	1942
Mar 2023	1687
Apr 2023	1441
May 2023	-
Jun 2023	1342
Jul 2023	1379
Aug 2023	1260
Sep 2023	1360
Oct 2023	1609
Nov 2023	1828
Dec 2023	2152

## NEW SPECIES RECORDED FOR THE YEAR INCLUDE:

MAMMALS: Buffalo and Aardwolf

BIRDS: Grey-headed Kingfisher, Sentinel Rock Thrush

INSECTS: Stink Bug

REPTILES: Short -Snouted Grass Snake

AMPHIBIANS: Tremelo Sand Frog



# Animals on the Reserve

## OTHER NEWS...

### MONTH

Jan 2023

- One blue crane pair was spotted with one chick on Ithala.
- A leopard was captured within the community and taken to Phinda.
- The team met with the community to discuss cheetah and buffalo introductions.

Feb 2023

- The first case of Foot & Mouth was reported in Colenso.
- The Esri license was received for free for the Ceres animal tags.
- Several grey crowned cranes were seen on the rye field performing their dances.

Mar 2023

- We finally received the Adequate Fence Enclosure Certificate.
- A community meeting was held where the introduction of cheetah and buffalo were signed off.
- 3 wild dogs left for Pongola to be bonded with 2 females after being in the boma for 87 days.

May 2023

- The State Vet came to check the buffalo fences in order for us to receive the buffalo permit.

Jul 2023

- The Giraffe Conservation Foundation joined us for a few days to take DNA samples from our giraffe to establish the sub species – a report is to be produced in 2024.
- The Cheetah Advisory Committee visited to chat all things cheetah for the first time.
- Panthera put out 12 trail cameras to try to establish the leopard corridor between Weenan, UmPhafa, Tugela Game Ranch and Zingela – several pictures of leopards, including a female with 2 cubs around the boma area, have been captured – a report is to follow.

Sept 2023

- Potentially 2 secretary birds were spotted nesting.
- So far in 2023, 6 new giraffe babies have been counted.
- An aerial game count was completed.
- 16 African buffalo were purchased.

Oct 2023

- Panthera came to remove camera traps.
- The Cheetah Advisory Committee came to inspect UmPhafa so that their support can be given to our cheetah permit.
- A 5-year cheetah management plan completed and sent to the Permits Office.

Nov 2023

- 16 African buffalo were delivered; 4 males, 12 females.
- Interns on UmPhafa built owl nesting boxes.

Dec 2023

- A leopard was captured in the community and taken to Dinokeng Reserve near Pretoria.
- Female leopard Chewy was spotted with 2 new cubs.



Blue Crane



Secretary bird



Grey-headed kingfisher

# On the Reserve

## RAINFALL

2022 was a record year for rain, however 2023 has not been so wet, with the rains only starting properly in November. This caused concern for the animals and quite a few ill and elderly animals who could not cope with the lack of nourishment did not survive. Despite an increased numbers of licks being put out, there were worries this would not be sufficient food so the purchasing of hay bales was considered.

YEAR	RAINFALL	YEAR	RAINFALL
2001	867	2014	534
2002	740	2015	477
2003	319	2016	461
2004	770	2017	707
2005	845	2018	776
2006	733	2019	728.50
2007	564	2020	833
2008	618	2021	852.50
2009	543	2022	1212.25
2013	547	2023	902.75

There are no figures for 2010 - 2012



# On the Reserve

## SECURITY AND POACHING

### 2022

No. of times fence stolen	No. of fence poles stolen	Fence metres stolen	Snares	Poachers in no dogs
6	0	419m	13	39
Poachers in with dogs	Damaged fences by animals	Animals taken	Incursion attempts	Poaching dogs killed
58	74	49	153	14

### 2023

No. of times fence stolen	No. of fence poles stolen	Fence metres stolen	Snares	Poachers in no dogs
9	0	105m	0	41
Poachers in with dogs	Damaged fences by animals	Animals taken	Incursion attempts	Poaching dogs killed
25	191	19	28	6

2023 saw the loss of fencing in Quarter 1 & 4 only – perhaps people shopping for Christmas as it all seemed to be around that time! An estimated cost for the lost fence, including the expense of repairing holes by animals and poachers, amounts to approx. R7040 (£300). At an average rate of R1000 per animal lost, R19000 (£800) in animals has been lost to poaching, but this could be much higher as we can only confirm if we see evidence – often animals are put in bags for easy removal.

Following on from the shooting of sports hunting dogs in December 2022, the year has seen a decrease in this species being taken, with only 6 being shot this year. Fewer animals on the reserve also impacts the poachers' ability to hunt for the animals. However, 3 spears, a hat and several pairs of gloves and pliers have been left behind by the poachers. The animals have also continued to damage and make holes in the fence which is very time consuming for the rangers to fix.

In December 2023 a different approach was taken by poachers to make large holes in the fence and then lay molasses outside the fence to entice the animals out – it is believed these sites were discovered before any animals were lost.



£2,000 was donated to the Reserve this year from an anonymous donor which has made a big difference to the field rangers' ability to carry out their role – 5 pairs of binoculars, 4 Game Pro torches and a solar camera trap were purchased. In addition to this, a new relationship has been formed with Wildlife Protection Services, who donated 3 solar camera traps valued at R45000 (£1900) which are working well.

UmPhafa Field Rangers

# On the Reserve

## OTHER NEWS

### MONTH

- Jan 2023
- The Mahindra vehicle was sold as repairs were regularly carried due to the heavy work driving on the roads – it was not solid enough for the work needed!
- Feb 2023
- Tropical Cyclone Freddy damaged the rangers' tent on Ithala and a tree fell down on the roof of the rangers' bathroom.
- Apr 2023
- Wildlife Protection Services donated 3 solar camera traps.
- May 2023
- A new vehicle was purchased for the field rangers – an old Landrover capable of navigating the tricky terrain and reaching all areas of the Reserve.
- Jul 2023
- Transnet Pipeline Security group gave a demonstration on the use of their thermal drone which they use to check for poachers along their oil pipeline. We have an arrangement where they will help with poaching incidents along the N3 or even inside the Reserve if required.
- Aug 2023
- A solar camera trap was taken by poachers despite being attached to a tree – Douglas from the Maintenance team designed and built metal cages for all our camera traps which are now chained to trees making them more difficult to remove
  - Work started on dismantling the old N3 Ranger outpost damaged by the Tropical Cyclone Freddy in February.
- Oct 2023
- Firearm training was started ready for the actual training and practical assessments later in the month – these consisted of 3 theory papers and 2 practical assessments. Training about buffalo and birds was also given.
  - New rangers Thabani and Nkosinathi started and Zwelisha left.
- Dec 2023
- The N3 outpost was almost completed, but it is able to be used over Christmas.



New Landrover



Game count



Donations

# Interns

53 interns were hosted at Sully this year, which included groups from Writtle University College, University of Suffolk and East Coast College. A new Student Intern, Luhan, was recruited and was made permanent once Cameron left half way through the year.

Feedback on the programme has been good this year and some interns have been lucky enough to see the rhino dehorning, experience game capture, which included a flip in a helicopter, spend the day with Rigardt collecting giraffe DNA samples and witness the release of the buffalo, which were all highlights. The interns have also carried out a variety of maintenance tasks, including making up animal licks, road repair, painting fence poles, building owl nest boxes, alien plant clearing, tackling bush encroachment, and much more.



# Interns

## MAINTENANCE

### MONTH

Jan 2023

- 60m of gabion was built along the Roosboom boundary fence.
- A fence between agricultural land and the community was erected to establish boundaries.
- Maintenance Manager Mark's water storage reservoir was renovated.

Feb 2023

- Repairs were completed on the rebuilt fire trailer and tanker.
- Retaining walls were built at Mark's workshop and a trench dug at Elworthy to aid the flow of water away from properties.
- A herbicide cage was built at the side of Mark's property to ensure herbicides are locked away at all times.
- A Padfoot roller was received.

Mar 2023

- With Tropical Cyclone Freddy hitting the area, lots of road, fence and tree removals were required.
- A drunk driver hit the R103 fence line.

Apr 2023

- 2 bedrooms were tiled at Sully House.
- The Sully House garage was completed with bamboo.

May 2023

- Perimeter burns were started for wild fire control.

Jun 2023

- The herbicide room was built at Elworthy.
- Perimeter burns were finished.
- The pipe to the wetlands area on the rye field was changed to increase flow of water pumped from river.
- The TLB tractor was damaged and was sent for repairs – the trailer hit a bridge breaking the arm.

Jul 2023

- Fire breaks were burnt around a neighbouring property.
- Fence N3 corner was replaced – a prime poaching spot.
- 6 gabions were built across the Reserve to aid in reducing erosion.
- Bush camp improvements were carried out.
- The staff kitchen had a makeover with paint and tiles to protect the walls when cooking, and in the sink area, and the next room was knocked through in order to give more space.
- A Reserve clean up was carried out over a few days.

Building gabions



Water break



Sully House



# Interns

## MONTH

- More gabions were built.
  - A wild fire was put out by the community and another from a lightening strike on Ithala.
  - Gas cylinder cage was constructed – a legal requirement for the storage of gas.
  - An old trailer was renovated for use by the interns.
  - A new access gate was installed at the foot and mouth trough at Elworthy for larger vehicles.
- Aug 2023
- The clearance of Acacia Karoo plants from around Elworthy began.
  - New solar houses were built ready for installation of inverters and batteries.
  - The dismantling of the N3 outpost got underway.
  - 100m of fence line was relocated back away from the Tugela River as there was a lot of erosion.
- Sept 2023
- Foundations were completed for the N3 ranger outpost.
  - The new buffalo fence was started on the perimeter of Tugela Steel to prevent the buffaloes fighting through the fence.
  - The clearing of Acacia Karoo continued.
  - A wild fire was put in by the community.
  - Another drunk driver crashed into the R103 fence.
  - The boma was cleared and repaired, ready for wild dogs arriving in the future.
  - The installation of new solar houses was completed and stands for the solar panels were also built.
- Oct 2023
- The fence line was sprayed as the weeds are affecting the electrical supply.
  - A wild fire was put in by the community.
  - The clearing of Acacia Karoo around Elworthy continued.
  - Another car crashed into the fence line, but did little damage - this was due to rain on the R103
  - A buffalo offloading ramp was built in readiness for their arrival in November.
- Nov 2023
- Large areas of ground was burnt (block burns).
  - The Sully borehole pump was taken out as there was no water in the 140m well. From now on, daily trips will be taken to fill up the water tanks at Sully from Elworthy.
  - Work continued on the N3 outpost.
- Dec 2023
- The N3 outpost is now 95% completed

Spraying aliens



Game capture



Block burns



# Community

## MONTH

- Jan 2023
- 6 ladies were employed from the community to be alien plant destroyers for 3 months.
  - The team met with the neighbouring Indunas to talk about buffalo and cheetah.
  - Riots began in Roosboom due to no electric or water for many days.
- Feb 2023
- Colenso had its first Foot and Mouth case.
- Mar 2023
- The community signed off on introducing cheetah and buffalo to the Reserve.
- Jun 2023
- 2 tanker loads of water were delivered to the Roosboom Community as, again, there was no water.
- Aug 2023
- The Reserve also gave Mdekane water as the river is very low.
- Sept 2023
- A student from Michaelhouse school joined us to complete 16 hrs of community work, which was spent clearing the R103 of rubbish collecting 16 bags and 6 bakkie (small truck) loads to be destroyed.
  - KwaZulu-Natal University joined us again for a week to carry out soil surveys. In total, 35 students and teachers came.
- Oct 2023
- Luhan, as part of his practical assessment, went to Mulukmahomed Lappa Sultan (ML Sultan) school to run an education session for 350 children about recycling.
  - Reserve Manager Amanda contacted Unisa to discuss potential opportunities for the students to come to UmPhafa to complete practical sessions.
- Nov 2023
- The Reserve recruited 6 ladies for Lantana to help with clearances again.
  - There were riots again in Roosboom due to the lack of water and electrics, and a road was closed.
- Dec 2023
- Mdekane finished her numbers at an all time record low, having sold her bull and some of her goats.



Alien plant destroyers



Water for the community



Collecting rubbish

# Training and Projects

## MONTH

- Mar 2023
- Reserve Managers Anthony & Amanda received training on the new geographic information systems (GIS) platform.
  - The Reserve's Work for the Water user licence was completed.
  - An Adequate Fence Enclosure Certificate was received.
- April 2023
- The Bio-diversity Protected Area process began.
- May 2023
- The process of collecting quotes for the installation of solar power was started.
  - Training was completed on driving the Field Ranger vehicle.
- Jun 2023
- The buffalo permit was received.
  - The application for Protected Area Status was approved.
  - The team attended a Zoom chat with the Rotary club – A Q&A session.
- Jul 2023
- Cameron left his position on the Reserve and Luhan was made a permanent staff member.
  - Rebecca Moore from Colchester Zoo joined us for a week.
- Aug 2023
- Kobus, from Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, approved our request to carry out a vegetation survey in Q1 2024.
- Oct 2023
- Intensive Ranger Firearm Training was completed, and there were interactions with the buffalo.
  - 2 new field rangers arrived and 1 left their position on the Reserve.
- Nov 2023
- The original owner of Elworthy's son came for a visit.
  - Penny, our neighbour, discussed possibilities of providing horse safari trips for Interns on UmPhafa.
- Dec 2023
- Work began on the renewal of the lease to the neighbour for agricultural land.
  - New student intern, Tiffany, was recruited, to start January.



Firearms training