



Reindeer

DECEMBER

MONTHLY OVERVIEW REPORT / 2025

COLCHESTER
ZOOLOGICAL
SOCIETY

Charity no. 1105621

THE ZOO



Mikolas, pigmy hippo

NEW ARRIVALS

A 2-year-old male pigmy hippo, named Mikolas, arrived on 3rd December from Zoo Dvur Kralove in Czech Republic.

Two pancake tortoises from Bristol Zoo, and two royal pythons from Noah's Ark arrived on 12th December. The pancake tortoises can be seen in the bottom floor of the Kingdom of the Wild building and the royal pythons are in the Elephant Kingdom habitat.

A female great grey owl, and a male red panda, named Iris, arrived from Cotswolds Wildlife Park on 16th December. The owl is housed off-show whilst she undergoes 30 days quarantine and the red panda was immediately mixed with female, Liwei.



Red panda

ANIMAL BIRTH

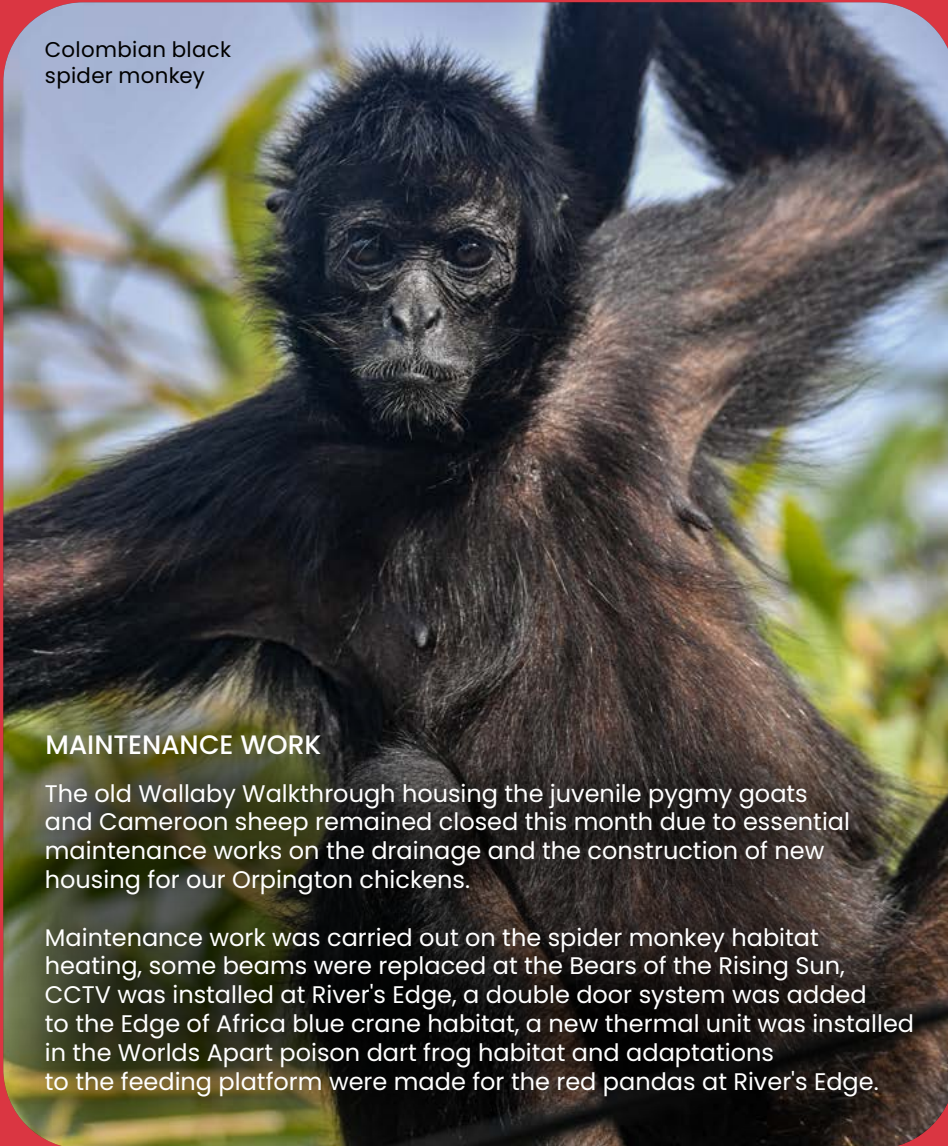
A prehensile-tailed skink was born on the 26th December, bringing the group to 12 individuals.



Prehensile-tailed skink

THE ZOO

Colombian black spider monkey



MAINTENANCE WORK

The old Wallaby Walkthrough housing the juvenile pygmy goats and Cameroon sheep remained closed this month due to essential maintenance works on the drainage and the construction of new housing for our Orpington chickens.

Maintenance work was carried out on the spider monkey habitat heating, some beams were replaced at the Bears of the Rising Sun, CCTV was installed at River's Edge, a double door system was added to the Edge of Africa blue crane habitat, a new thermal unit was installed in the Worlds Apart poison dart frog habitat and adaptations to the feeding platform were made for the red pandas at River's Edge.

ANIMAL TRANSFERS

Juvenile male king vulture, Luther, transferred to Cotswolds Wildlife Park on 16th December. He had been housed off-show when work commenced on the king vulture aviary in September.

OTHER ZOO NEWS

Visitor animal experience assessments were completed and reviewed for primate, giraffe and rainforest sections. Various staff members also watched a BIAZA CPD webinar on completing visitor animal experience assessments.

The Deputy Team Leader of Reptiles attended an online BIAZA Reptile & Amphibian Working Group meeting.

An internal team leader meeting was led by various members of the Animal Care Team, focusing on latest updates from the BIAZA working groups of which they are members.



Cameroon sheep



Pygmy goat

EDUCATION



Reindeer

39

REINDEER SESSIONS RUN IN
TOTAL ACROSS NOV-DEC

Across 23 schools and 6 home
education sessions,
for a total of 895 children.

35

SCHOOLS VISITED
COLCHESTER ZOOLOGICAL
SOCIETY THIS MONTH

BRINGING IN A TOTAL OF

1,194

STUDENTS

39

SCHOOL
SESSIONS RAN
AT THE ZOO

23

OF THESE FOCUSED ON
CHRISTMAS REINDEER



Amur leopard

14

HOME EDUCATION
SESSIONS WERE
RUN IN DECEMBER

11

OF THESE WERE
REGULAR SESSIONS

1

OF THESE WAS A
S.E.N.D. SESSION

2

OF THESE WERE
REINDEER SESSIONS



Poison dart frog

92%

OF VISITING SCHOOLS
ATTENDED SESSIONS

This is one of our highest
relative percentages with
visits vs. educated.

VOLUNTEERS



61 VOLUNTEERS
IN ATTENDANCE

CONTRIBUTING
305
HOURS

ENGAGING WITH
4,743
VISITORS

1,721
VISITORS ENGAGED WITH AT
THE EXPLORATORIUM

WITH
1,404
BOXES

RESEARCH

3

RESEARCH STUDIES BEGAN THIS MONTH:

THIS MONTH: OUR RESEARCH COORDINATOR:

- Set up gelada baboon visitor animal experience (VAE) behavioural monitoring to trial the integration of behaviour monitoring in VAE assessments.
- Launched a study on chimpanzee behaviour to generate a baseline to compare to dietary changes made.
- Set up projects observing the new male hippo overnight to monitor how he is settling in since his arrival on 02.12.2025, a new elephant enclosure use project to assess the importance of providing choice of indoor / outdoor access and the impact this has on elephant behaviour and enclosure use, and on mixing of the red pandas following arrival of the new male.
- Attended a BIAZA research committee meeting at ZSL London Zoo.

Zoomonitor is regularly used for studies organised by the Research Coordinator, as it fits in easily with the keepers' schedules.

We currently have projects to support Quality of Life assessments for instant observations on the male lion, male blue crane, and enclosure use and behaviour for four capuchins. We also have data collection underway for visitor animal experience assessments via 30-minute observations for bears and giraffes, and all occurrence recording for the female tiger.

We also have a number of apprentice keeper research projects ongoing, reviewing data on giant tortoise behaviour and conducting a survey on training reinforcers.



Feeding enrichment effect on captive Eurasian grey wolf (*Canis lupus lupus*) behaviour.

Eurasian grey wolf



Assessing the behavioural patterns of the buff-headed capuchin (*Sapajus xanthosternos*) and how they utilise different areas of their new habitat at Colchester Zoological Society.

Buff-headed capuchin



Kingdom of the Wild

Exploring how exhibit design and management shape visitor views of animal welfare and experience: a study of mixed species exhibits.

UMPHAFA NATURE RESERVE



Giraffe



Jackal
buzzard



Duma, cheetah

1 LAST MINUTE OPPORTUNITY

We received a last-minute opportunity to move 4 giraffe – 2 males and 2 females – off the reserve. This helps with reducing our giraffe populations as their numbers are currently too high for the carrying capacity that the Reserve can support.

2 SOFT RELEASES

FreeMe Wild asked if we would do a soft release for 2 injured jackal buzzards, a juvenile male and an adult female. They were fed chicks and rats each day before release in the middle of the month.

1 CHEETAH PASSED AWAY

Sadly, male cheetah, Duma, was killed on Christmas Day by a leopard. He arrived on the 24th May and was released from the boma on 28th August. He had been doing well, walking the reserve, even meeting up with the other cheetah. As an arch enemy, the leopard was defending his territory and reducing the competition for food!

Moving forward, the plan is to reduce the leopard population in 2026 by moving them to other reserves and to hopefully introduce more cheetah.

The last remaining 2025 intern left in the first week of December, after a 3 month stay. He played an important role in the rehabilitation of the male cheetah, Balula - he was there for his arrival, when his dressings on his injured leg were changed and for his release and follow up on the Reserve.

With the Interns gone, the Maintenance Team worked on the intern accommodation; varnishing and painting the outer doors, re-cementing around the rondavel*, redoing the floors, major work on the coordinator's room where water had come in through the ceiling and along the back wall and rechecking and fixing all plumbing and electrics.

The north of the Reserve received 221mms of rain in December and Elworthy farm received 177mms – the highest rainfall in December since 2020. Several of the storms were sudden and caused damage to fences, trees were felled, large rocks fell on to roads, fences were washed away and the streams and rivers flooded. Throughout the month, the Maintenance Team spent time fixing and putting in more gabions to protect the fence line, and when they were on Christmas break, the Field Rangers stepped up and repaired several critical areas.

* a traditional Southern African circular dwelling, typically featuring cylindrical walls made of stone, mud, or brick, topped with a conical thatched roof.



Buffalo

NEW BUFFALO CALF

The buffalo started off Christmas with a new calf - we are hoping a few more will be born in the next few months.

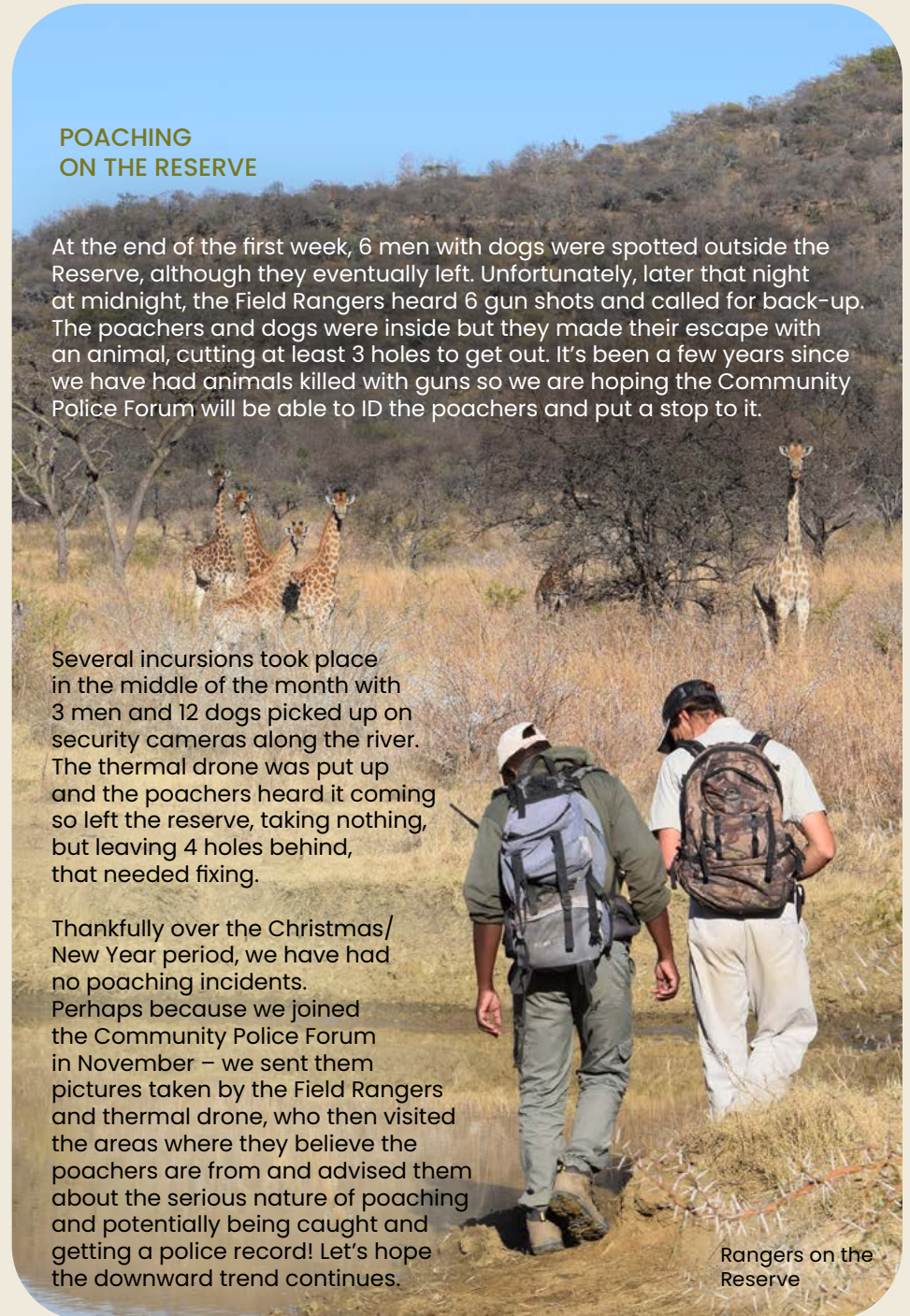
POACHING ON THE RESERVE

At the end of the first week, 6 men with dogs were spotted outside the Reserve, although they eventually left. Unfortunately, later that night at midnight, the Field Rangers heard 6 gun shots and called for back-up. The poachers and dogs were inside but they made their escape with an animal, cutting at least 3 holes to get out. It's been a few years since we have had animals killed with guns so we are hoping the Community Police Forum will be able to ID the poachers and put a stop to it.

Several incursions took place in the middle of the month with 3 men and 12 dogs picked up on security cameras along the river. The thermal drone was put up and the poachers heard it coming so left the reserve, taking nothing, but leaving 4 holes behind, that needed fixing.

Thankfully over the Christmas/ New Year period, we have had no poaching incidents. Perhaps because we joined the Community Police Forum in November – we sent them pictures taken by the Field Rangers and thermal drone, who then visited the areas where they believe the poachers are from and advised them about the serious nature of poaching and potentially being caught and getting a police record! Let's hope the downward trend continues.

Rangers on the Reserve



CONSERVATION



£3,469 DONATED TO WILDCATS ALLIANCE



WildCats grants funds to projects in five countries within Asia, including Thailand for the critically endangered Indochinese tiger, Nepal where the success story of increasing tiger numbers is driving the need to increase the focus on coexistence, conflict mitigation and habitat restoration, Sumatra funding conservation in a landscape that holds around one third of the remaining Sumatran tiger population, and the Amur region; across this transboundary landscape they are funding two large scale projects with WCS, these cover a range of support for national park staff through SMART training, providing equipment, population monitoring of both Amur leopards and tigers and community focused projects..



£7,500

DONATED TO FREE THE BEARS

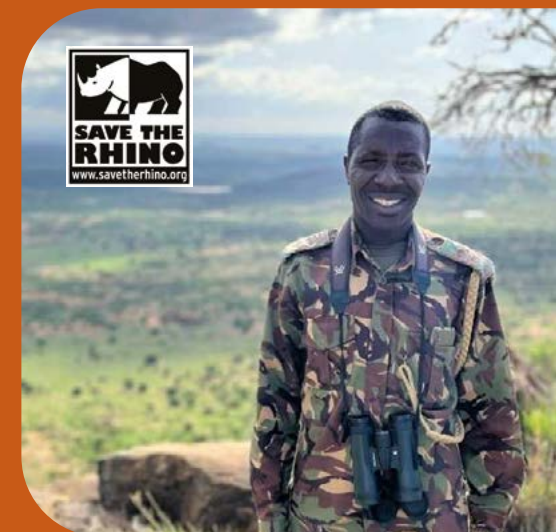
£6,000 is to be used to increase the capacity of the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary in Laos for housing rescued sun bears. The plan is to house all sun bears in one area, maximising opportunities for social integrations and maintaining flexibility to adjust group compositions as animals mature. £1,500 will be used to improve capacity for the use of rescued sun bears in ex-situ conservation-focused research through operant conditioning and specialist facility design.



£8,547

DONATED TO SAVE THE RHINO INTERNATIONAL

for the purchase of uniforms for rangers. The success of rhino conservation in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi National Park continues to depend on the dedication and resilience of field rangers who patrol some of the most challenging terrain in South Africa. To carry out this work effectively and safely, it is essential that they are properly equipped, including with durable, appropriate uniforms.



African elephant

ONLINE MEETING

The Zoological Director attended a BIAZA Conservation Committee online meeting.