



# The

# Meerkatter

The Friends of the Kalahari Meerkat Project Report - [www.kalahari-meerkats.com](http://www.kalahari-meerkats.com) - **September 2019**

<i>The Tale of the Cursed Burrow.....</i>	1-2	<i>Weather at the KMP.....</i>	3
<i>A Decade of Brea.....</i>	2-3	<i>Life History Details.....</i>	3-4
<i>Pregnancies in September.....</i>	3	<i>Group Territories September 2019.....</i>	5

## The Tale of the Cursed Burrow

For most people October is considered the spookiest month, however, here at the KMP it was most definitely September! As some will remember Sigma (VLF230) gave birth to her first litter as the dominant female of Lazuli on the 21<sup>st</sup> of last month. The group was babysitting the litter at a sleeping burrow near Big Dam and this is the scene of the Cursed Burrow!

So, the tale of the Cursed Burrow! Sigma (VLF230) had given birth, the babysitting burrow was on the edge of their usual territory, volunteers were visiting the group almost daily and a worrying trend began to appear. At first, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August Nelson (VLM248) and Sizzle (VLM252) did not wake up with the group. Initially they were presumed to be babysitting, it is not uncommon for babysitters to not get up with the group, or not to be seen for a session. However, the two boys were never seen again!!

It was possible that they were roving, Sizzle (VLM252) would have been a little young, as he was only 5 months old. However, with meerkats they like to show us that anything is possible! Yet, a month passed and both Nelson (VLM248) and Sizzle (VLM252) were given their last seen. Volunteers were disappointed because both boys had been extremely lovely meerkats.



The six Lazuli pups some of who succumbed to the Cursed Burrow with Nelson (VLM248) on the left, and with the dominant male Polon (VJXM095) in the middle with the collar. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Rowan Weaver.

Then, not even 10 days later, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, Splat (VLM254) was not seen during a session. He was also thought to be babysitting but then was never seen again!! With three meerkats missing this was

when volunteers started to jokingly call the babysitting burrow the Cursed Burrow.



The Cursed Burrow. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Siomha Campbell.

Volunteers began to speculate what could be dwelling in this burrow. Whatever it was it seemed to target the juveniles. The group was still babysitting and Sigma (VLF230) was still lactating, this suggested that the pups were still alive. However, something had happened to the two juveniles Sizzle (VLM252) and Splat (VLM254), while Nelson (VLM248) had been more than a year old when he disappeared! One day meerkat volunteers Narelle Hill and Lucie Reinwalt were at Lazuli for a session and noticed that after the group had started to forage, the babysitter, Weasel (VLF241) was panicking at the babysitting burrow. She appeared to be mobbing something below ground! This really suggested that there was something threatening somewhere in this burrow!

A few days later, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September tragedy struck again as Slop (VLM253) was not seen during a session. This litter had already faced many tragedy's! Apart for the latest disappearances this litter had lost a littermate previously. They initially started out as a litter of 7 but one pup never foraged with the group and was presumed to have died. They also lost their mother Filthy McNasty (VLF223) when they were barely 2 months old.

On the next day, September 17<sup>th</sup> the group abandoned the litter moving to another sleeping burrow and have not returned to the Cursed Burrow since. At this stage it appeared that there was no

hope for little Slop (VLM253). Then, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, about 15 minutes after a depleted Lazuli had gone below meerkat volunteer Lucie Reinwalt saw something moving out of the corner of her eye. On further inspection it was Slop (VLM253)!!! She followed him. He went straight to the burrow Lazuli had gone down, to the exact bolt hole the group went below at! He paused and moments later Polon (VJXM095) the dominant male popped his head up, Slop (VLM253) approached slowly, and Polon (VJXM095) groomed him!!! Slop had been accepted back into the group. He had returned!



Slop (VLM253) the prodigal son who returned and was accepted back into the group after being missing for 14 days!

This was the happy ending everyone had wanted but nobody expected! Slop (VLM253) had survived the Cursed Burrow and came back to the group looking quite fat. We hope that this is the end of the curse for Lazuli and that October will be significantly less spooky than September was here at the KMP.

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## A Decade of Brea

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Brea (VLM157), the iconic dominant male at Whiskers, was born between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2009. This current year would have marked his 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. Happy birthday Brea! To celebrate this impressive advanced age, let's go through some of Brea's busy life highlights.

10 years ago, in September 2009, Lazuli was one of the biggest groups followed by the KMP at the time, they were 23 individuals lead by Young (VLF111) and Wollow (VWM105). Sometime in between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup>, Young (VLF111) gave birth to her 9<sup>th</sup> litter. About three weeks later, four pups emerged, two males and two females. Buter (VLM156), Brea (VLM157), Griene Tsiis (VLF158) and Grutte Pier (VLF159) were the four newest members of the Lazuli family. Their names were inspired by a language from the northern part of the Netherlands. The first three ones translate to 'Butter, Bread and Green Cheese', the very last one is the name of a rebel leader from this region. Buter (VLM156) and Grutte Pier (VLF159) sadly did not make it to their first birthday, but Griene Tsiis (VLF158) grew older

than the age of 4 (and disappeared in November 2013). Our last litter member, Brea (VLM157) has had many adventures, and is still with us after 10 years an unusually old age for a meerkat!

Brea (VLM157) grew up at Lazuli, and just before turning 2, he went on his very first roving exploration in July 2011 at Jaxx. He was gone for about 3 months and had been seen approaching Jaxx seven times. From this day on, young Brea (VLM157) was always on the move, he would leave his home group, go visit neighboring groups and come back, but just a few days at a time.



Brea (VLM157) guarding, making sure his family stays safe. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Lucie Reinwalt.

Mid-October 2011, he emigrated out of Lazuli alongside with Snowy (VLM147) and Rufio (VLM155), two of his eldest brothers. They encountered three females from Jaxx later in October and formed a new group: Cavemen. Snowy (VLM147) became dominant after the former dominant, originally from the Lazuli family as well, Franz (VLM149), had disappeared, so Brea (VLM157) kept on going roving, he has visited Jaxx, Lazuli, Whiskers, Uberkatz and Toyota numerous times while his home group was still Cavemen.

After about a year and a half of being a subordinate, Brea emigrated out of Cavemen to join the more than iconic group Whiskers! As often, he was not on his own, but well accompanied by his two brothers Rufio (VLM155) and Snowy (VLM147). This event marked the end of Cavemen, as all members dispersed. The oldest male, Snowy (VLM147), took dominance once again, over Whiskers this time, and within a day. The two younger brothers continued to go roving. Neighboring groups were different around Whiskers, new opportunities to see new groups and maybe find a group of their own? Both were seen approaching Jaxx (as usual), but also Ewoks and Drie Doring a large number of times. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2014, Brea (VLM157) was seen at Drie Doring. This date marked the very last time Brea was seen at another group than Whiskers. Indeed, just three days later, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October, Brea took over dominance. Some males woke up with several injuries and were very submissive to the new leader, that was asserting his newly gained dominance. Both Snowy (VLM147) and Rufio (VLM155) stayed at Whiskers until



September 2015, when they were both last seen. They got their last sighting on separate days, but both were away from their home group, seen on another roving expedition.

At the time, Pe'Ahi (VWF177) was the dominant female, but sadly disappeared in September 2015. Her sister Swift (VWF176) took over dominance two weeks later, forming the new dominant pair with Brea. Both of them are still the leaders of the Whiskers family today! Twenty-two litters were born into the group and 44 pups have been seen since this day. The old couple, Brea being 10 and Swift being 7½, are currently raising their latest litter born in August. The three little pups are growing up and the entire group is taking care of them.

Brea turned out to be long lived and very successful dominant males. We cannot wait to see what these two are going to be up to in the near future! Long live Brea!

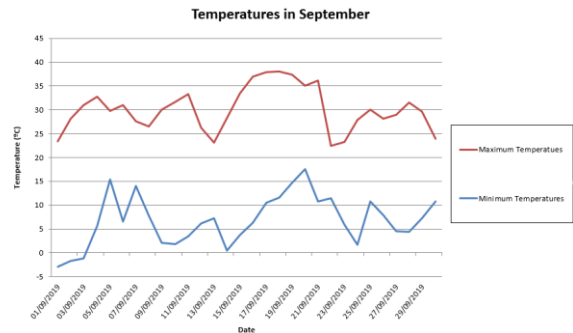


Brea (VLM157) and Swift (VWF176) grooming each other, having a couple moment before leaving their burrow to go foraging. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Narelle Hill.

### Pregnancies in September 2019

<b>Females pregnant in September</b>	<b>2</b>
Females who aborted	0
Females who gave birth, litters lost	0
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	0
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	0
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	2

### Weather at the KMP



September 2019 was much warmer than September 2018. The lowest temperature reached this month was -2.9°C on the 1st, this is 4.1 degrees warmer than the lowest measure for last year. The maximum temperature reached was 38°C in mid-September which is an increase of 2.4°C compared with the previous year.

### September 2019 Life History Details

#### (Little) Creatures:

- It was a quiet month for Little Creatures this September. Kanye (VCRM002) has finally stopped roving as he did not leave the group at any stage this month.
- All members are in good health.

#### Elrond's Council:

- There were 2 group splits for Elrond's Council this month; one where they separated and reunited within one day and one of an uncertain duration.
- Habituation is improving day by day.
- The dominant male Gandalf was not seen during the last session of the month.
- All members are healthy.

#### Gold Diggers:

- Scaramouche (VGDM004) had split from the group for some days, he was seen away from the group with 4 other meerkats, thought to be other members of Gold Diggers on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- On the 23<sup>rd</sup> he was seen only with George (VGDM006), then on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> he was seen with an unknown male juvenile and an adult female.
- On the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> he was found alone. Then on the 28<sup>th</sup> the entire group was reunited.
- The group looks healthy.

#### Hakuna Matata:

- The four pups are getting bigger by the day!
- Dante (VHMM007) and Guacamole (VHMM008) both left and returned to the group only once.
- The group had one split where they separated and reunited within one day.
- The bald patches on Flint (VHMF001), Pet (VCVM001) and Mozeralla (VHMF015) reported on last month have healed and there have been no reports of new ones developing.



**Jaxx:**

- Baloo (VJXF080) is officially pregnant again.
- The group had one split of uncertain duration.
- All individuals look healthy.

**Lazuli:**

- Tonks (VLF235) is officially pregnant, Sigma's (VLF230) litter was lost before they emerged.
- Nelson (VLM248), Sizzle (VLM252), and Splat (VLM254) disappeared for unknown reasons and were all given a last seen.
- Finnick (VLM234), Israel (VLM247) and Slop (VLM253) all left and returned to the group once. Thursday (VLM239) left and returned twice. While Fledermaus (VLM242) left and returned 3 times in September.
- All members are in good health.

**Make-e-plan:**

- September was also a quiet month for Make-e-plan.
- Tom (VMPM031) the single pup is nearly catching up in size to members of the previous litter born in March!
- All members are healthy.

**Namaqua:**

- Namaqua also had a very calm September.
- The Whiskers boys Bonnie (VWM209) and Clyde (VWM208) have stayed with the group.
- The group is healthy.

**Tswana:**

- Tswana has had an eventful September!
- Lil' Nasty (VTSF002) was found predated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September.
- Currently there is no individual at the group with a collar; there have been multiple attempts to collar another individual, so far this has not been successful.
- All individuals look healthy.

**Ubuntu:**

- Ubuntu had one encounter with Guacamole (VHMM008), who spent time with, Daisy (VBBF111) the dominant female at Ubuntu. However, the rest of the group approached Guacamole (VHMM008) he ran away!
- The group had one split where they separated and reunited within one day, and all members are in good health.

**Whiskers:**

- Three pups Bel-hurricane (VWF231), A Molerat (VMW232) and Meicko (VWM233) emerged from the babysitting burrow and foraged with the group for the first time on the 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Whiskers had one group split of uncertain duration in September.
- The group is healthy.

**Zulus:**

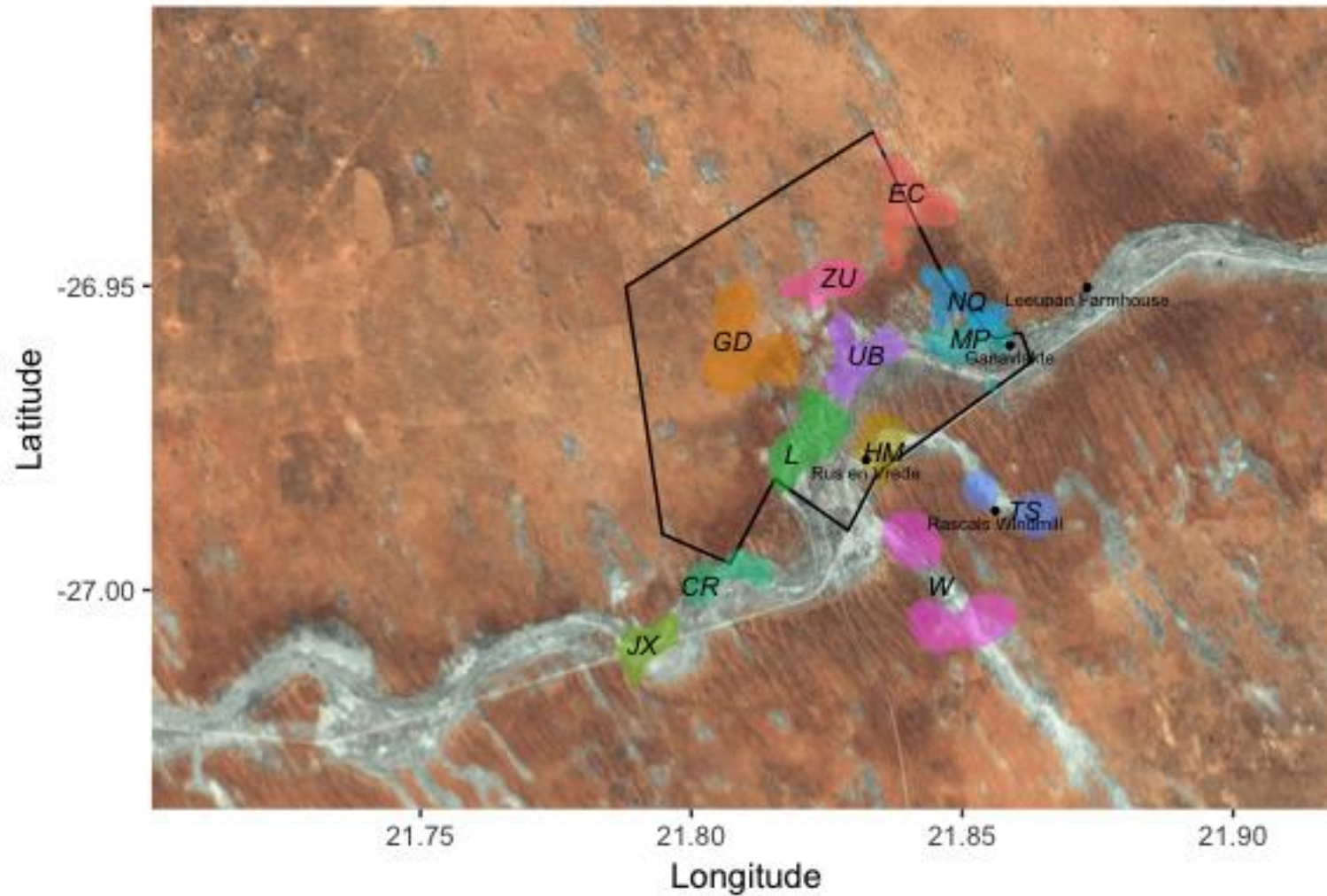
- September was also a calm month for Zulus.
- Sauce (VZUM026) only left and returned to the group once this month, within the same session.
- All members are healthy.

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**The following authors contributed to this report:**

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## Group Territories September 2019



**Key:** CR: Little Creatures, EC: Elrond's Council, GD: Gold Diggers, HM: Hakuna Matata, JX: Jaxx, L: Lazuli, MP: Make-e-plan, NQ: Namaqua, UB: Ubuntu, TS: Tswana, W: Whiskers, ZU: Zulus.