



# The

# Meerkatter

The Friends of the Kalahari Meerkat Project Report - [www.kalahari-meerkats.com](http://www.kalahari-meerkats.com) - January 2020

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Dear Readers,

Due to Lazuli's current habituation levels the group cannot be filmed, therefore, we can release their information for the foreseeable future. However, Ubuntu has stepped into the spotlight and unfortunately we can no longer release their information in the Meerkatter. We thank you for your understanding. Please enjoy January's Meerkatter

Many Thanks,  
Siomha and Zoe

## Trials and Tribulations of the Rovers and Evictees for January

January has been a busy time at the KMP for several notorious roving males, subordinate females facing the wrath of their pregnant dominants, along with some smaller adventures of sub-adults and pups!

One of the biggest troublemakers of the month was Sauce (VZUM026) who went roving a total of 7 times. For most of these excursions, Sauce would wake up with Elrond's Council before bidding farewell with a final look back to them from the distance before making his journey towards Namaqua. Unfortunately for Sauce, his endeavors at Namaqua always resulted in him being war-danced and chased away – no matter how many times he repeatedly decided to approach. Luckily for him though, Elrond's Council consistently welcomed him back to the burrow each night, so he had a safe place to rest and recover before his next attempt. Prior to his recent roving, Sauce has a history of leaving Zulus with some occasional encounters at Ubuntu although not to the same extent. He is certainly one to watch in the near future for whether this new roving confidence will continue, or whether he will decide to settle at Elrond's Council for a while longer.

Shandy (VHMM023) who went roving from Hakuna Matata last month is still on his travels for his first major roving experience. In this time, he has been approaching Ubuntu initially and now Lazuli, however, has only so far been met with plenty of war-dancing and chasing in response. Shrew (VUBM018) from Ubuntu has occasionally been seen with Shandy during his few days spent roving where he also decided to take a trip to Lazuli. Our other

interesting rover this month was The Worm's Heart (VCRM010) who took a couple of days away from Little Creatures to head towards Jaxx. He was spotted close to Jaxx on one occasion as well as encountering them where he was war-danced and chased away. With no successful immigrations for any of the rovers this month, we wish them best of luck next time.



Sauce (VZUM026) sneakily approaching Namaqua while roving in January 2020. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Siomha Campbell.

There was more success this month for the previously evicted female from Jaxx, Didah (VJXF112). Here she showed that determination is key. While the group repeatedly chased her away when she appeared, she would remain near the group and even continue to go below at the same sleeping burrow, albeit a few holes away. Much like the last time she was evicted in October 2019, it was only following Baloo (VJXF080) giving birth that she was then accepted back into the group. Our other evicted females of the month are Bigwig (VMPPF022) and Toscana (VMPPF020) from Make-e-Plan who are still evicted with an unknown fate. Not only has Toscana been evicted while Bridget (VQLF011) is pregnant but she is also pregnant herself which is likely to be a further contributing factor to her eviction.



Similar to Didah at Jaxx, both Bigwig and Toscana have been remaining near to the group with several appearances that often result in being chased away. While Toscana has experienced an eviction from the group previously, this is the first eviction for Bigwig and so we await to see if either individual will be accepted this time around. Can they be as successful as Didah?

In other movement news, there was a short adventure in store for Namaqua's Quarrel (VNQM010) and young pup Mononoke Hime (VNQF014). Upon arrival of an evening session, both were found to be missing and concern grew when they were still missing the following morning. Thankfully, they were found in the evening where they had returned to the sleeping burrow before the rest of the group. Both were in good health and accepted quickly, Quarrel had lost a little bit of weight while Mononoke Hime seemed well fed. With both being such lively characters of Namaqua, we can only imagine what mischief they got up to that day!



Didah (VJXF112) evicted from Jaxx, observing the group from afar. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Shaz Alderton.

As we enter February, we are sure that there will be further roving and evictee journeys to report on as we still have many pregnancies for this summer season. With foraging seeming to be high from good rainfall, success in roving can be more likely with potentially more available fertile females readily evicted by pregnant dominant females.

### Super Mothers of the KMP.

January was another exciting month here at the KMP. We have had nine females that have either given birth or are considered officially pregnant in January. For many of these meerkats, such as Baloo (VJXF080), Bridget (VMPF011) and Heatherleigh (VQLF018), this is not the first time they have been pregnant. However, this month we have also had some females have their first pregnancy, such as Galadriel (the undyed yearling female) from Elrond's Council.

Conditions have been very favorable lately with significantly more rain than last year. Between November 2019 and January 2020 there has been 52.7mm of rain recorded at the KMP. In the same period of the previous year there was 36.2mm recorded, i.e. a 16.5mm difference. This has greatly improved foraging for the meerkats, which has

potentially led to more of the females getting pregnant with another litter almost immediately after giving birth.

The gestation period for a meerkat is approximately 70 days according to recent literature. Females usually display signs of pregnancy that volunteers can see after about 45 days. Many of the females have been considered officially pregnant within 50 days of giving birth to their last litter. For instance: Bridget gave birth to a litter of five pups on 17<sup>th</sup> of November, 43 days later she was considered officially pregnant again with the litter she is currently pregnant with. Baloo gave birth to a litter of four pups on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2019, 80 days later, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January she gave birth to another litter of four pups! These four pups have emerged and started to forage with the group alongside the two survivors of the previous litter.

Spruddel (VZUF028), however, is the other end of this spectrum. She is considered officially pregnant currently with this being only her second pregnancy. She gave birth to her last litter in May 2019 and has not been recorded as pregnant since. This litter will be her first since she was confirmed to be the dominant female of Zulus. The pregnancy was exciting news here at the KMP as it had been so long since she was pregnant.

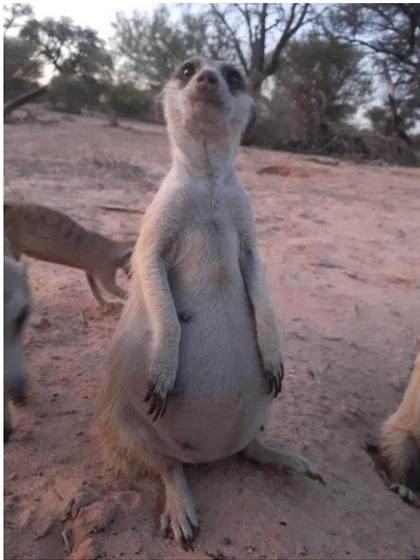


Spruddel (VZUF028) pregnant for only the second time, the first since she was confirmed dominant of Zulus. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Zoe Turner.

Meerkats are typically seasonal breeders, however with the mild winter last year there were some groups that had litters out of the usual breeding season, Make-e-Plan for example had a litter born in June, considered peak winter at the KMP. Other groups truly stick to the breeding season, Tayl Baez (VBBF117) typically has one litter around November/December, peak summer and another around February to April, the tail end of summer.

Two of our most seasoned mothers Bridget and Heatherleigh are both pregnant again this month.

This will be Bridget's 12<sup>th</sup> litter and Heatherleigh's 9<sup>th</sup>. Hopefully Heatherleigh's current litter will be Namaqua's third successful litter. We are hopeful as Heatherleigh has only lost 2 litters in the past and Namaqua is much stronger as a group than it has been previously. As of January 31<sup>st</sup> Heatherleigh, has still not given birth despite weighing 1080g in the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup>. Her average weight when not pregnant is between 650g-700g! Bridget has only had pregnancies while dominant of Make-e-Plan. Bridget, however, seem to have a problem with her subordinate females getting pregnant. While Heatherleigh was a subordinate at Make-e-Plan she had 4 litters, Toscana (VMPF020) was evicted this month while officially pregnant, this is her second pregnancy.



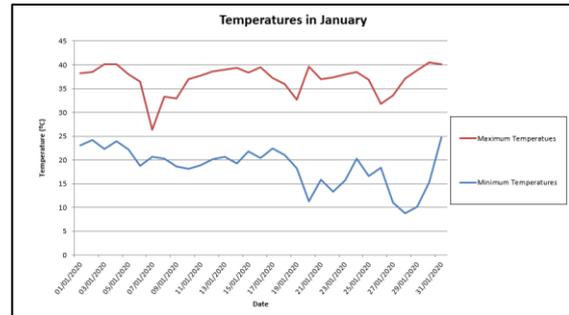
Heatherleigh (VQLF018) heavily pregnant with her 9<sup>th</sup> litter. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Maggie Campbell-Jones.

Pups are not the only way the meerkat population has increased this month. At our habituation groups Tswana and Gold Diggers volunteers have been able to dye new individuals that we can now consistently identify! At Gold Diggers one pup from the latest litter has been dyed as well as a sub-adult female! There are now six identifiable individuals in Gold Diggers! As for Tswana, January was a very successful month! The two pups from the latest litter were dyed as well as one adult female and one yearling male. This was very exciting as there is only one adult female in Tswana so we can assume she is the dominant female. Now that this female (VTSF009) is identifiable she is the first Tswana female to be considered officially pregnant!

## Pregnancies in January 2020

<b>Females pregnant in January</b>	<b>10</b>
Females who aborted	0
Females who gave birth, litters lost	0
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	1
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	2
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	7

## Weather at the KMP



January started warm here at the KMP. It cooled down significantly at the end of the month. The highest temperature recorded this month was 40.6°C, while our coolest temperature was 8.8°C. There was 16mm of rain in January at the KMP.

## January 2020 Life History Details

### Elrond's Council:

- The five Elrond's Council pups are doing well, growing bigger by the day.
- Tayl Baez (VBBF117) is pregnant with another litter.
- Galadriel (undyed yearling female) gave birth but no members are lactating, it is unclear if the pups have survived.
- Smeagol (VECM006) left and returned to the group once this month. Sauce (VZUM026), who was missing at the end of last month returned, then went roving a further 7 times returning to the group each time.
- The group had one group split that lasted less than one day.
- All group members are healthy.

### Gold Diggers:

- This month two more Gold Diggers individuals were dyed (VGDF009 + VGDM010) which is a clear sign that habituation levels are improving well.
- Three pups have still been present with the group and are becoming increasingly better with habituation, allowing a close approach.
- All individuals look healthy.



**Jaxx:**

- Baloo (VJXF080) gave birth on the 6<sup>th</sup> January, with four pups (VJXP137, VJXP138, VJXP139 + VJXP140) being seen and dyed. They have all ended the month foraging with the group successfully. VJXP140 was the keenest of the four, foraging first on the 29<sup>th</sup> January, with the rest joining the next day.
- Beatles (VJXM113) and Alya (VJXF130) were given their last seen this month.
- Didah (VJXF112) was accepted back into the group on the 11<sup>th</sup> January following her eviction last month. She appeared at the group 7 times prior to this at the start of the month, her determination to return paid off.
- The group encountered The Worm's Heart (VCRM010) once, as well as an unknown individual on one occasion.
- Didah (VJXF112) has a bald patch on her tail base from a previous injury, but this looks to be healing well.
- All individuals look to be in good health

**Lazuli:**

- Two of the unnamed pups from last month's litter (VLP259 + VLP260), along with Xanax (VZUM050) were absent at the end of this month.
- Thursday (VLM239) was given his last seen.
- Following being absent at the end of last month, Xanax (VZUM050) returned to the group, before leaving and returning once more prior to his final leave of the month.
- The group encountered Shandy (VHMM023) nine times during the month, and Shrew (VUBM018) three times.
- The group looks healthy.

**(Little) Creatures:**

- The Worm's Heart (VCRM010) left and returned twice, ending the month back with the group.
- Habituation is going well with the three dyed individuals, and improvements seen in leaving the burrow more calmly with both the dyed and wild individuals.
- The group is in good health.

**Make-e-plan:**

- Bridget (VQLF011) is officially pregnant with her thirteenth litter, the 5 pups from her previous litter are doing well.
- Toscana (VMPF020) was evicted in January and joined Bigwig (VMPF022) who was evicted last month. Toscana (VMPF020) appeared to the group on six occasions, while Bigwig (VMPF022) appeared on seven occasions this month. Both were still evicted as of the end of the month.
- Toscana (VMPF020) is also officially pregnant and will be watched closely for this during her eviction period.
- Make-e-plan encountered with one unknown meerkat in January.
- All individuals look to be in good health.

**Namaqua:**

- Heatherleigh (VQLF018) is pregnant with another litter, while Zuko (VNQM012), Manzaï (VNQF013) and Mononoke Hime (VNQF014) are growing day by day.
- Quarrel (VNQM010) and Mononoke Hime (VNQF014) left and returned to the group once in January.
- Bonnie (VWM209) left the group once this month, appeared to the group on one occasion after this and is still missing as of the end of January.
- Sauce (VZUM026) encountered at Namaqua six times this month.
- Bonnie (VWM209) was still displaying signs of tuberculosis when he went missing this month, however all other group members are healthy.

**Tswana:**

- The dominant female of Tswana, who is currently unnamed (VTSF009), was successfully dyed and has now been recorded as also being officially pregnant. We hope for a successful first official litter soon.
- Two pups (VTSM006 + VTSM007) had their first foraging event at the beginning of January and are growing up well, they will soon be juveniles in the next month.
- The two adult males who immigrated into Tswana in November have not shown any more signs of tuberculosis.

**Zulus:**

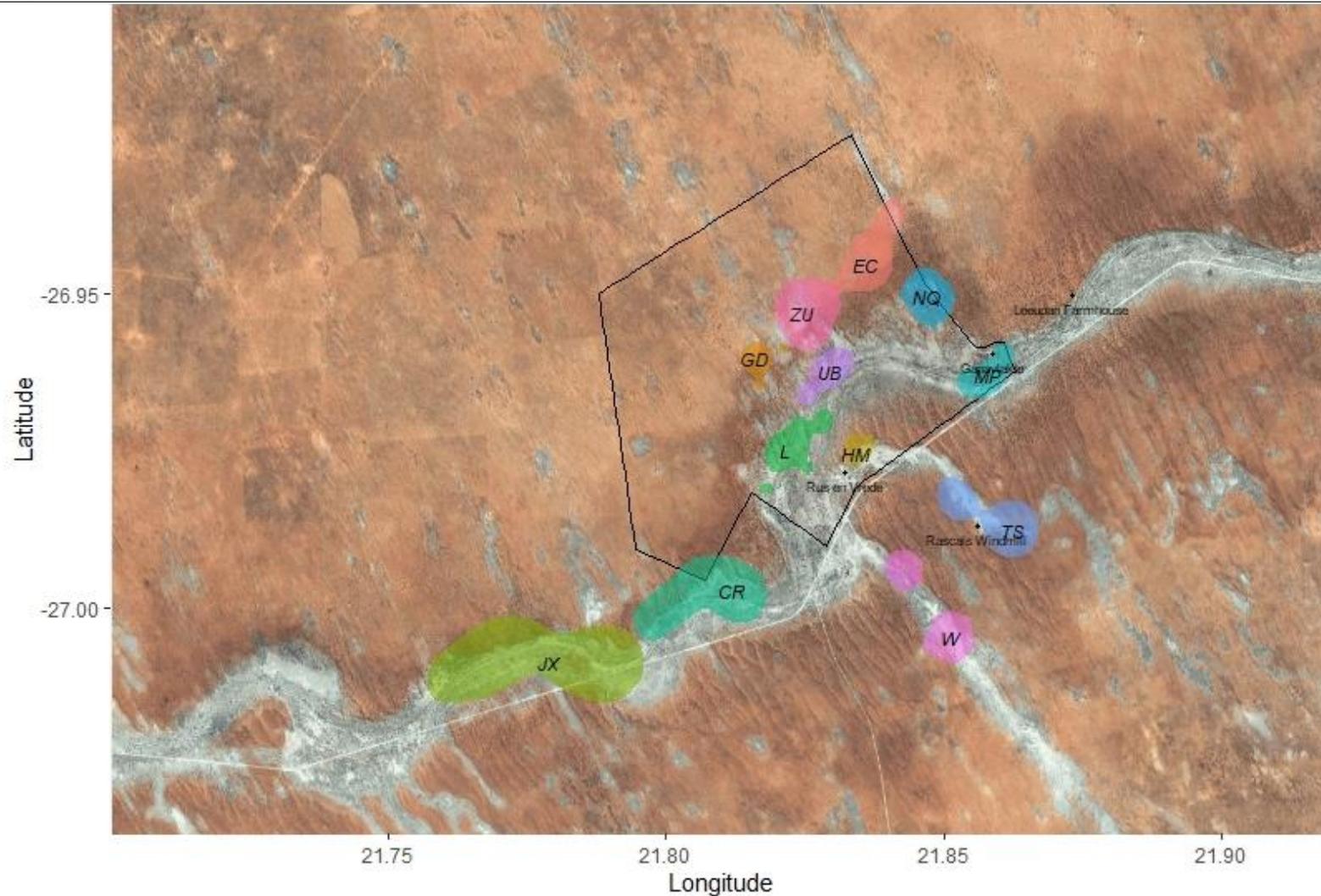
- There was no clear dominant male in Zulus in January, Pixie (VWM210) was submitting to both Scuzi (VWM213) and Jay-a-Rod (VWM216), however, there has been no clear dominant between them.
- Spruddel (VZUF028), the dominant female, is officially pregnant, the first time since officially taking over dominance.
- Zulus had 2 encounters with unknown meerkats, as well as, an inter-group interaction with an unknown group. With where this Inter-group interaction occurred it is possible that the group could have been Kamala's (VBBF116) new group.
- Pixie (VWM210) has a neck wound that appears to be healing.

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

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## Group Territories January 2020



**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.