



# The Meerkatter

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

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## **Pet: The Meerkat, The Myth, The Legend**

Pet (VCVM001), one of the founding members of Hakuna Matata, was first seen, as a juvenile, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2011. He was seen initially with another iconic meerkat Brea (VLM157) and his brother Rufio (VLM155), while they were roving away from their group, Cavemen. When they returned to the group, Pet immigrated into Cavemen. This group consisted of four individuals: Dinkop (VJXF008), the dominant female, Franzs (VLM149), Brea, and Rufio. Pet was the first new addition to this group. When first seen by the meerkat volunteers in 2011 he was already very well habituated, he was used to being around people, despite having never been seen in the population before. He also had been declawed on his right paw. Declawing is, unfortunately, a common occurrence with pet meerkats. This combined with his lack of fear from humans lead volunteers of the time to deduce that he had probably been a pet meerkat previously, hence the name Pet.



Pet (VCVM001) displaying vigilance behaviours during a session with Hakuna Matata. You can see his right paw has been declawed. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Lea Seur.

Pet was given a head dye mark and added to the population. With these dates we can deduce that he is approximately 8 years old. He has had an eventful life in those eight years; Pet was seen roving at Whiskers a total of eight times, Toyota twice, Lazuli once, Jaxx twice, Uberkatz once, Driedoring four times and Ewoks a record total of 23 times! He also immigrated and emigrated into and out of Lazuli and Thundercats once, and Whiskers and Ewoks twice before he and Alan Johnson's Beemer (VLF206) founded Hakuna Matata in 2016.

Pets Roving adventures took a lull while he and Alan Johnson's Beemer (AJB) were dominant at Hakuna Matata; he stayed settled until July of this year. A return to his roving ways was potentially sparked by the disappearance of AJB in April; Pet was related to all the females in his group. He approached Ubuntu and Lazuli once and Make-e-Plan twice since July.

On the third of October, Pet, Dante (VHMM007), and Guacamole (VHMM008) lead Hakuna Matata further and further away from their usual territory. This was unusual; it seemed to be that the three males were attempting to go roving and the group was following them. This view was confirmed later in the day as Pet, Dante and Guacamole were seen approaching Make-e-plan. After these encounters, the three males then seemed to disappear.

With no sightings for weeks, hope was fading that they would return to Hakuna Matata, and it was becoming increasingly likely that something had happened to them. Then, on the 20<sup>th</sup>, meerkat volunteer Narelle Hill was with Make-e-Plan. They were in the midst of an encounter with an unknown meerkat, when she spotted another meerkat; and this one had a collar. As it approached Make-e-Plan, she noticed that his right paw was clawless! It was Pet!! As he approached Make-e-Plan however, Banksia (VVHM117) attacked Pet, who was already looking a little worse for wear. There was now fresh concern for his safety.



Pet looking worse for wear after multiple weeks away from his group. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Lea Seur.

Five days later and 3.5km away, volunteers were getting ready for their afternoon field session. As one



volunteer was walking towards the farmhouse they saw a meerkat out of the corner of their eye. This itself is not surprising, they assumed it was Hakuna Matata. However, on closer inspection this meerkat looked a little scruffy, and his right paw had no claws. It was Pet! His collar was removed as it was damaged, he was quite skinny, had a lot of parasites and had lost his dye marks. He was re-dyed and weighed; he had lost 168g since he was last weighed!

This really was exciting for the volunteers. While we are professional and have to avoid anthropomorphizing the meerkats, many members of the team have a soft spot for Pet and were delighted to see him back in his old territory. At this stage Hakuna Matata were approximately 700m away, meaning it could be possible for him to rejoin his group! Pet, as of the 30<sup>th</sup> of November, has not rejoined the group. However, Hakuna Matata is moving ever closer, and were less than 600m away on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Pet is still seen around the farmhouse at least once a day. We are all hopeful that he will rejoin the group soon!

### Kids of the Kalahari

This month there was a baby boom at the KMP. As you know, Baloo (VJXF080) gave birth last month. She had four pups that emerged on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November and started foraging with the group on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Swift (VWF176) gave birth to her twenty-first litter only 81 days after giving birth to her previous litter! So far there have been two pups seen that emerged from the babysitting burrow, however they have yet to forage with the group. Heatherleigh (VQLF018) has given birth to Namaqua's third litter, one pup was seen below in the burrow mouth with its eyes still closed, and more pups were heard below! Bridgit (VQLF011), Heatherleigh's sister, has given birth to her eleventh litter. No pups have been seen yet. Bridget is lactating, and babysitters have been left every day!



Two of the latest Jaxx pups investigating a tortoise while foraging with the group. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Siomha Campbell.

The baby boom also extended to our habituation groups; A Goldiggers female who was seen to be very pregnant emerged on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month looking like she had quite obviously given birth. The group has remained at a babysitting burrow with females lactating and babysitters left. There were

more than just births in November; Flint Lockwood (VHMF001) and Double Fluff (VHMF010) of Hakuna Matata are both officially pregnant, as is Sigma (VLF230) the dominant female of Lazuli and Daisy (VBBF111) the dominant female of Ubuntu.

Unfortunately, it was not all good news in November; we have had ten official losses from the population this month. To be removed from the population, adult males have to not be seen for two months, while females and males who have not reached adulthood yet are removed after one month. Pups are assumed predated after one week.

Elrond's council's previous wild dominant male Gandalf was removed from the population this month, as was Merry (VECM002). Scaramouche (VGDM004) was found dead on the 18<sup>th</sup> of this month. Of the four pups to emerge at Jaxx this month, only two remain, with the two others assumed predated. Make-e-Plan faced the largest losses this month with five members removed from the population. Crunchy Nut (VMPF006) and Dauphinoise (VMPF007), two evicted females, were given their last seen this month. Two yearling males (Kim (VMPM014), and Kourtney (VMPM015)) were also removed from the population. Tom (VMPM031), the last survivor of his litter, was given his last seen at the end of this month.

Despite these losses there was other good news at the KMP in November. Some will remember that last month there were problems with Elrond's Council's collar, and it was very difficult for volunteers to find the group. This has been rectified, as on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November the dominant female was captured and recollared with a brand-new collar, expected to last for two years! This was excellent timing, as Tayl Baez (VBBF117) was deemed to be officially pregnant and gave birth this month! Last month both collared males at Little Creatures were found dead, and the group seemed to have moved from their usual territory. The team was worried that the entire group may have dispersed, until the group was refound on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November by meerkat volunteer Kara Akien. The next day, The Worm's Heart (VCRM010) was collared. This collaring turned out to be of excellent timing, as one of the wild females was pregnant and gave birth at the end of the month!



Endorphine (VTSF005) with her new collar (third from the right), meaning volunteers can now track Tswana again. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Siomha Campbell.



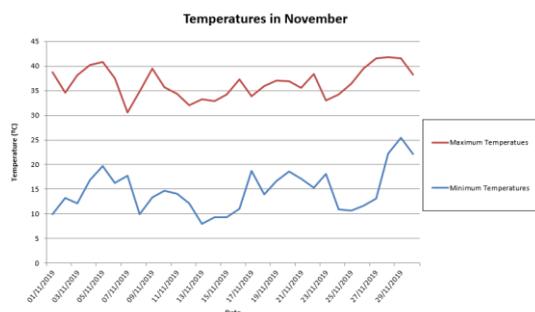
Finally, we cannot talk about collaring habituation groups without mentioning Tswana. The previous collared individual at Tswana was found dead in September, and the task of collaring a new member of the group proved difficult. This was due to the habituated individuals being too small to carry a collar, and the adults refused to allow themselves captured. Luckily, Endorphine (VTSF005) became a sub-adult this month, and was big enough to carry a small collar. After over two months of attempts Tswana was finally recollared on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November! Tswana themselves aided us with this feat as one of the adult females, you have probably guessed, gave birth, and the group was babysitting.

It has been a very busy month at the KMP in terms of pregnancy's and births with eleven out of twelve groups either having at least one officially pregnant female or having a litter of pups already! It is going to be a very busy summer for all the volunteers keeping track of all these pups!

### Pregnancies in November 2019

<b>Females pregnant in November</b>	<b>11</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	6
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	4

### Weather at the KMP



In November 2019 we reached our hottest temperature so far in 2019, with 41.8°C on the 28<sup>th</sup> of the month. Our coolest temperature was 8.0°C on the 13<sup>th</sup>. There was a total of 4.8mm of rain for the month of November here at the KMP.

### November 2019 Life History Details

#### (Little) Creatures:

- The Worms's Heart (VCRM010) was collared on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November.
- One of the wild adult females gave birth between the 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of the month and is lactating.
- All members appear to be in good health.

#### Elrond's Council:

- Tayl Baez (VBBF117) was collared on the 1<sup>st</sup> and gave birth between the 26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of the month.

- Gandalf the previous undyed dominant male and Merry (VECM002) were both given their last seen this month and are now removed from the population.
- Pippin (VECF003), Legolas (VECM009), Gimli (VECM010), Aragon (VECM011) and Sauce (VZUM026) all left and returned to the group once this month.
- Elrond's Council had encounters with Kamala (VBBF116) four times in November and twice with Sauce (VZUM026).
- The group had two inter-group interactions with Zulus this month and one group split lasting less than a day.
- Kamala (VBBF116), Sam and Frodo (the two wild yearling males) were considered missing at the end of the month.
- The group looks healthy.

#### Gold Diggers:

- One of the wild adult females gave birth this month and the group is babysitting.
- Scaramouche (VGDM004) was found dead on the 18<sup>th</sup>.
- George (VGDM006) and Goldeneye (VGDF007) returned to the group this month.
- All Gold Diggers individuals look healthy.

#### Hakuna Matata:

- Flint Lockwood (VHMF001) and Double Fluff (VHMF010) are both officially pregnant.
- Darjeeling (VHMF029) and Bender Bending Rodriguez (VHMF035) both left the group this month.
- Hakuna Matata had one encounter with Finnick (VLM234) this month and two group splits both lasting less than a day.
- Pet (VCVM001), Dante (VHMM007), Guacamole (VHMM008), Shamrock (VHMM021) and Darjeeling (VHMF029) and Bender Bending Rodriguez (VHMF035) were missing from the group at the end of the month.
- All individuals look to be in good health.

#### Jaxx:

- Four pups emerged and started to forage with the group this month. Two of these pups (VJXU134, VJXU136) went missing and were removed from the population, while the two others (VJXM133 and VJXF135) continue to forage with the group.
- Beatles (VJXM113) left the group once this month and has yet to return.
- The group had one group split lasting less than a day.
- The group is in good health.

#### Lazuli:

- Sigma (VLF230) is officially pregnant.
- Finnick (VLM234) left and returned to the group twice in November, Annie (VLF240), Weasel (VLF241), Luther (VLM245) and Israel (VLM247) all left and returned on one occasion.
- Thursday (VLM239) left the group twice and has yet to return, Tonks (VLF235) left on one



occasion and has also not returned. Fledermaus (VLM242) is still missing from the group.

- The group had two inter-group interactions with Ubuntu this month.
- All members are in good health.

#### **Make-e-plan:**

- Bridgit (VQLF011) gave birth on either the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> of November.
- Crunchy Nut (VMPF006), Dauphinoise (VMPF007), Kim (VMPM014), Kourtney (VMPM015) and Tom (VMPM031) were given their last seen this month.
- Khloe (VMPM017) returned to and left the group again this month and was missing as of the 30<sup>th</sup> of November. Toscana's (VMPF020) eviction ended on the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month.
- The group had four encounters with both Moo (VMPF019) and Toscana (VMPF020) this month; as well as one encounter with Pet (VCVM001), and six encounters with unknown meerkats. Make-e-Plan had one inter-group interaction with an unknown group of meerkats in November.
- All individuals look to be in good health.

#### **Namagua:**

- Heatherleigh (VQLF011) gave birth between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of November.
- The group had one group split of uncertain duration.
- Clyde (VWM208) was still missing from the group at the end of this month.
- Bonnie (VWM209) has started to show signs of tuberculosis, developing a submandibular lump this month.

#### **Tswana:**

- Endorphine (VTSF005) was collared on the 28<sup>th</sup>.
- One wild adult female gave birth this month.
- The group had an encounter with an unknown meerkat.
- Two adult males have immigrated into the group and both are displaying signs of tuberculosis. Both males have submandibular lumps.

#### **Ubuntu:**

- Daisy (VBBF111) is officially pregnant.
- Shrew (VUBM018) left and returned to the group twice this month.
- The group had one encounter with Shrew (VUBM018) while he was roving, as well as three encounters with both Finnick (VLM234) and Luther (VLM245), four encounters with Israel (VLM247) and one encounter with an unknown meerkat.
- There were two inter-group interactions between Ubuntu and Lazuli.
- Mr. Bojangles (VUBM015) and Bon-Bon (VUBM016) were still missing at the end of this month.
- The group is in good health.

#### **Whiskers:**

- Swift (VWF176) gave birth on the 9<sup>th</sup> of the month and two pups were seen and dyed later in the month.
- Pixie (VWM210), Scuzi (VWM213) and Lilac (VWM214) immigrated back into the group on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November.
- All group members are healthy.

#### **Zulus:**

- Pixie (VWM210), Scuzi (VWM213) and Lilac (VWM214) emigrated out of this group on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November.
- Zulus had three inter-group interactions this month, two with Elrond's Council and one with an unknown group.
- All members are in good health.

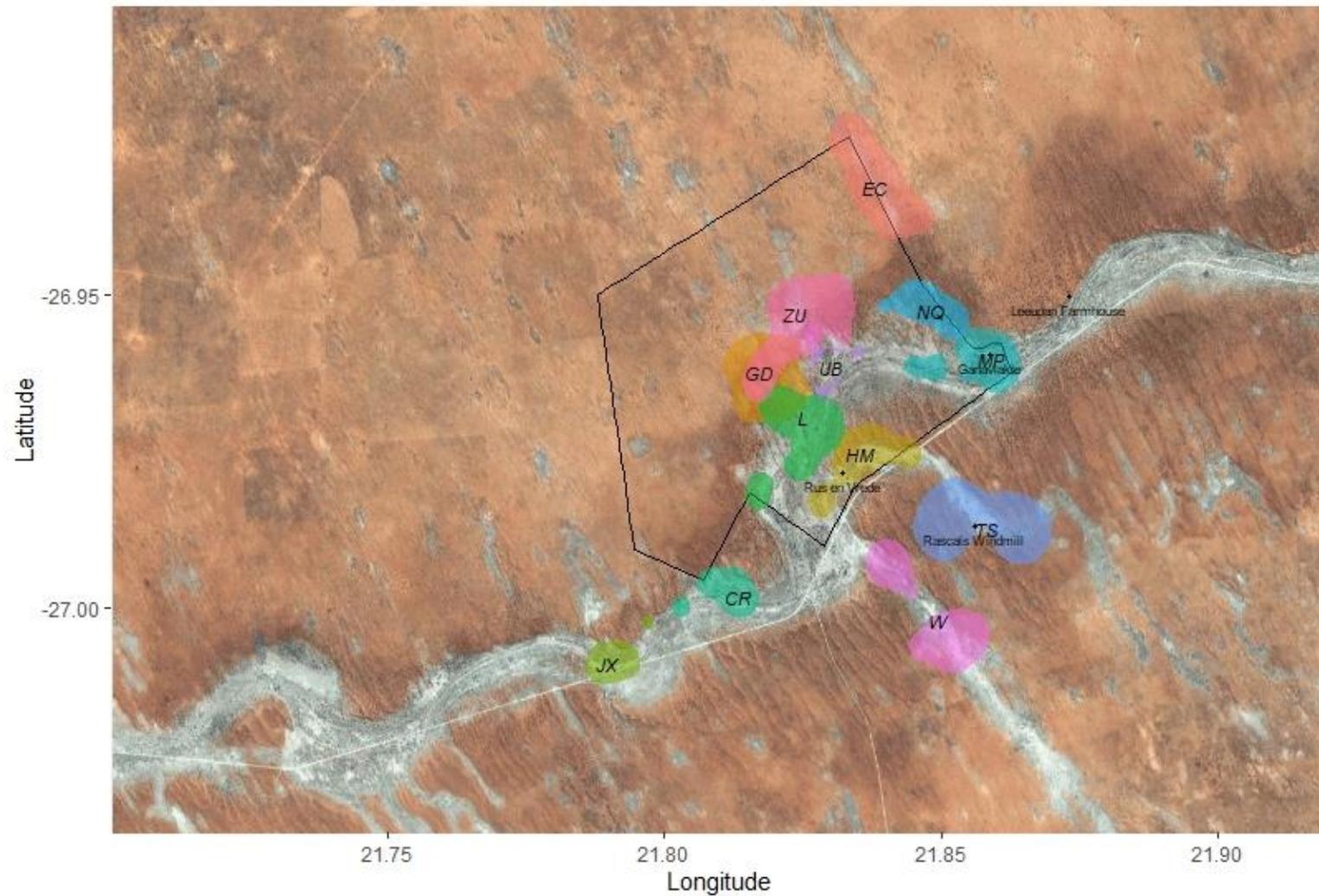
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#### **The following authors contributed to this report:**

Síomha Campbell, Life History.

## Group Territories November 2019

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**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.