



The

Meerkatter

The Friends of the Kalahari Meerkat Project Report - www.kalahari-meerkats.com - February 2020

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Smeagol's Battle

Elrond's Council woke up on the 9th of February as normal, and all members were present and accounted for. Also, that evening they returned to the same sleeping burrow as the previous night and went below all as normal.

The next day there was no volunteer with the group in the morning, however, that evening, when a volunteer arrived for their session one of the pups, Bilbo (VECM015) was missing. Furthermore, Smeagol (VECM006), was injured. He was limping badly on his left forearm, which was extremely swollen. He was also quite fatigued, but he did manage to keep up with the group and went below with his family.

The next morning, however, Smeagol did not emerge with the group, and he was not seen for the entirety of the morning session. There were concerns that his injuries may have been caused by a snake bite and that Smeagol had died overnight. Yet, that afternoon, Smeagol had caught up with the group. He was alive! Though his injuries seemed to have worsened. Now his left forearm and shoulder were swollen he was still fatigued and limping quite badly and now his breathing was labored.

The next day his injuries had worsened further, impacting his ability to keep up with the group and he was left behind. Where his shoulder was previously swollen, and was initially seen with a bald patch, later in the session this bald patch had developed into a large open wound from his left shoulder to his left wrist. His arm was still swollen, and he could not put any weight on it at all. The only positive was that he did not seem as fatigued as previously reported and there were no signs of labored breathing. Smeagol rejoined the group late in that session but was not foraging properly and needed all his energy to keep up with the group.



Smeagol (VECM006) resting at the sleeping burrow after keeping up with the group during the day. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Siomha Campbell.

In the following days, Smeagol continued to keep up with the group and began to put more weight on his forearm again. The arm was still swollen, and the wound was beginning to look infected. At this point volunteers sought out a veterinary opinion on what could have caused these injuries. In their opinion the injuries were potentially caused by the bite of a puff adder snake! A snake also potentially explains the disappearance of Bilbo. He disappeared at the exact same time as when Smeagol's injuries first appeared.

For the next week Smeagol's wound did not show any signs of improvement, but also did not seem to get any worse. There were no more signs of fatigue and labored breathing. The wound appeared to scab over, but the tissue underneath did not look healthy and seemed infected. After one week of this the wound reopened and the scab was gone. Initially this was concerning, however, without the scab the tissue looked much healthier and from this point forward the wound healed at a significantly faster rate.



Smeagol (VECM06) left forearm wound has healed significantly. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Siomha Campbell.

The wound that initially covered the entirety of Smeagol's left shoulder and continued down his forearm to his left wrist, healed into a thin wound from his shoulder to his elbow, with approximately 25% of its original size. He continues to limp but not nearly as badly. He has begun to act like his usual self again having foraging competitions with his younger brothers constantly.

Smeagol will more than likely be left with a scar on his forearm but hopefully there will be no long-term effects from the trauma. It is truly remarkable that a small meerkat can experience the attack of a puff adder and survive!

Scuzi Takes Dominance at Zulus

As of the 11th February, Zulus finally had a clear dominant male (VWM213) after being without a dominant male since the 15th October 2019. This change of dominance comes after other major changes in the group composition over the last several months.

The previous dominant male, Palestrina (VLM211), left along with Langa (VZUM033) and Umfana (VZUM034) who all immigrated into Elrond's Council on the 26th October 2019 after other encounters and attempts at Ubuntu prior to this. Still today, those three males are all present at Elrond's Council with Palestrina maintaining his dominant position there since the day he was recorded as immigrating into the group.

When Palestrina left Zulus in October, this left Spruddel (VZUF028) as the dominant female of a small group of predominantly females. While there were one or two unidentified males at the group following this, they were not consistently seen and so not considered as part of the group. One male who

did get himself into the group was Xanax (VZUM050) who was first seen on the 3rd November with the group. His stay here was cut somewhat short and without him having a chance to show any true dominance.

Three males originally from Whiskers – Scuzi (VWM213), Pixie (VWM210), and Jay-a-rod (VWM216) – first began encountering Zulus back on the 24th October 2019 and successfully immigrated in, before heading back home to Whiskers on the 14th November. This left new male Xanax to be the only male. The three Whisker's males did not keep that as their only attempt at Zulus, as once again they all encountered Zulus at the beginning of December. Both Scuzi and Jay-a-rod successfully immigrated into the group again on the 19th December 2019. Pixie wasn't quite as successful as Scuzi took this as what would be his first attempts to assert some form of dominance over Pixie. After being attacked and chased away by Scuzi between the 19th and 27th December, Pixie was seen to forage with the group for an entire session on the 27th December and so was considered to have successfully immigrated in.

During this time, Xanax had submitted to Scuzi and Jay-a-rod before deciding his time at Zulus was up and heading over to Lazuli where he was seen to have immigrated in on the 26th December. Unfortunately, it appears that Lazuli may also not be the group for Xanax as he left and returned several times before last being seen with the group on the 14th January.

Back to Zulus, and this was all just the beginning for the long decision in which of the males originally from Whiskers would now become dominant at Zulus. Pixie began his time in Zulus with a large neck wound – it is unclear how this occurred although it was seen during the time in which he was regularly encountering Zulus and being attacked by Scuzi prior to his immigration. Following his acceptance, Pixie continued to be subjected to many dominance assertions by Scuzi of which he would often submit in response. Jay-a-rod was also the target for Scuzi to assert his dominance over, however, these were less regular, and Jay-a-rod did not present any clear submissions directly to Scuzi and so the dominance in the group remained uncertain for a while longer.



Scuzi (VWM213) anal marking part of a shrub during his quest to gain and maintain dominance of Zulus. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Shaz Alderton.

Pixie recovered from his throat wound but remained the target for further dominance assertions for the following month until they were witnessed displaying intense dominance competitions on the 5th and 6th February. These were often at fighting level with many directed at Pixie as well as Jay-a-rod, both who resulted in presenting minor injuries such as Pixie's limp and a small wound on Jay-a-rod's head. The situation was not as clear as previously thought as at this point Jay-a-rod was also the initiator for fights with Pixie, along with Scuzi himself submitting to both Jay-a-rod and Pixie.

Unfortunately, the group was not seen for three days due to Spruddel's radio collar failing earlier than expected, and the group not being sighted in the most recent areas of their territory. This meant that there is still some of the story unknown for what occurred next in the dominance decision. We were able to confirm Scuzi's dominance finally though on the 11th February when both Pixie and Jay-a-rod were witnessed clearly submitting to Scuzi. Since this date, there have still been some dominance assertions and submissions as dominance is continuing to be maintained, however it is looking like Pixie is receiving significantly less attacks and so will hopefully have a much more peaceful time next month.

We continue to observe Zulus with this new dominance change as to how long it will remain and how the group may change further. Spruddel appears to have lost the litter from her pregnancy we reported on last month, but Lil G (VZUF029) and Lentil (VZUF032) are currently pregnant.

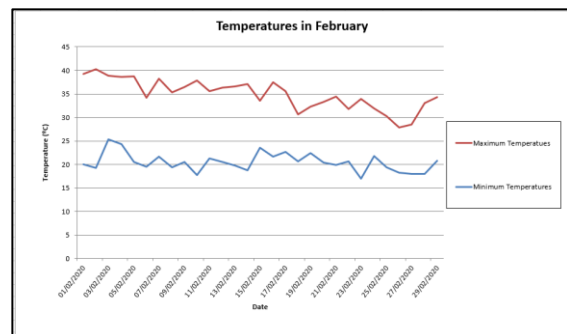


Pixie (VWM210) being vigilant within the group following the dominance change, his neck scar clear. Photo Credit: Meerkat volunteer Shaz Alderton.

Pregnancies in February 2020

Females pregnant in February	14
Females who aborted	2
Females who gave birth, litters lost	1
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	3
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	4
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	4

Weather at the KMP



February maintained relatively stable minimum temperatures this month at the KMP, while the maximum temperatures steadily declined through most of the month. Towards the end of the month there were signs of a slight temperature increase again. The highest temperature for February was 40.2°C, while our coolest temperature was 16.9°C. There was 48.4mm of rain this month at the KMP.

February 2020 Life History Details

Elrond's Council:

- Tayl Baez (VBBF117) aborted a litter this month and Pippin (VECF003) was noted as officially pregnant and was still pregnant at the end of the month.
- Bilbo (VECM015) left the group once this month and did not return, he was given his last seen.
- Sauce (VZUM026) left and returned to the group three times in February.
- Smeagol (VECM006) suffered an injury this month. It was suspected he was bitten by a puff adder. His left forearm was swollen with a large wound, he was reported to have laboured breathing and was so fatigued that he was left behind by the group on two occasions. He returned to the group both times and is doing significantly better as of the end of the month.
- All other group members are healthy.



Gold Diggers:

- One of the wild undyed females gave birth at Gold Diggers this month and the group is still babysitting.
- All individuals look healthy.

Jaxx:

- The four pups at Jaxx have been named Nibs (VJXM137), Cubby (VJXM138), Tootles (VJXM139) and Slightly (VJXM140).
- All individuals look to be in good health

Lazuli:

- Annie (VLF240) and Weasel (VLF241) both gave birth this month, the fate of the pups is unclear as there has been no individuals lactating. Sigma (VLF230) is officially pregnant.
- Two unnamed pups (VLP259 and VLP260) from the previous litter born in December were given their last seen this month.
- Sausage (VLF255) left the group once this month and has yet to return. Xanax (VZUM050) is also absent at the end of the month.
- Lazuli had nine encounters with Shandy (VHMM023).
- Habituation of the wild males is progressing well.
- The group looks healthy.

(Little) Creatures:

- The undyed adult female gave birth this month and the group is still babysitting.
- Habituation of the three dyed individuals is good. The wild individuals are leaving more slowly to forage at a closer distance to observers
- The group is in good health.

Make-e-plan:

- Bridget (VQLF011) gave birth this month and six pups have emerged and started to forage with the group.
- Toscana (VMPP020) and Bigwig (VMPP022) both appeared twice at the group in February and both of their evictions ended this month. Toscana (VMPP020), however, left the group again after this and is still absent.
- Make-e-Plan had one encounter with an unknown meerkat this month.
- One pup (VMPP041) was not seen in the last session of the month.
- All individuals look to be in good health.

Namaqua:

- Heatherleigh (VQLF018) gave birth at the beginning of this month. Only one pup Hiccup (VNQF016) was seen emerging and beginning to forage with the group. This may be due to a large monitor lizard that was spotted in the babysitting burrow before the group moved Hiccup (VNQF016) to another burrow.
- Bonnie (VWM209) was given his last seen this month. He was last seen in January when left behind by the group, displaying many signs of tuberculosis.
- Namaqua had two encounters with Sauce (VZUM026) in February.
- All group members are healthy.

Tswana:

- All dyed individuals were present at the end of this month, and so the group currently consists of 7 dyed and 4 wild individuals.
- Britney (VTSF009) gave birth this month, and currently there have been 4 pups seen to emerge.
- Habituation for the group is currently still in progress.
- The two adult males who immigrated into Tswana in November have not shown any further signs of tuberculosis.

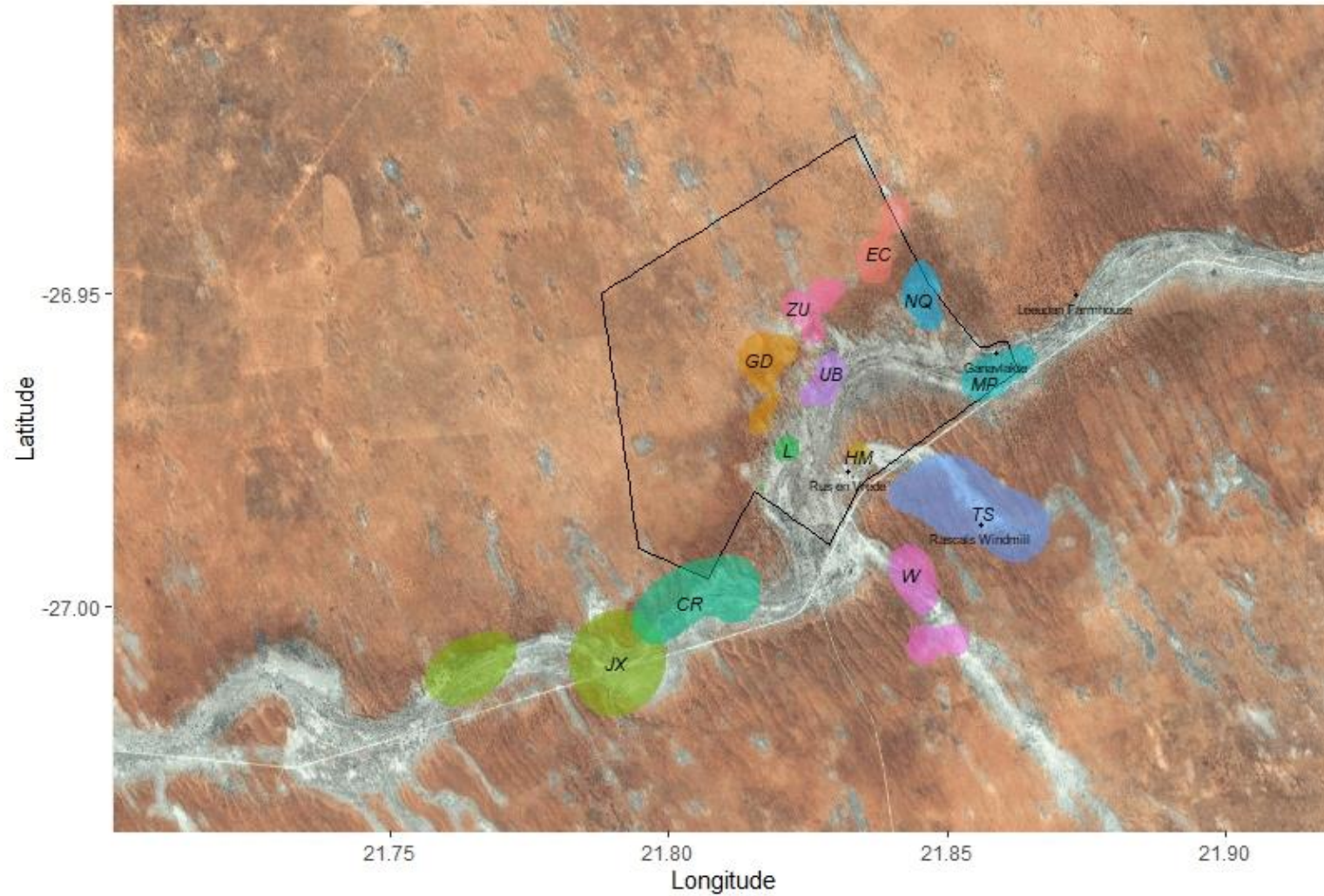
Zulus:

- All group members were present at the end of February.
- Scuzi (VWM213) became the dominant male after both Jay-a-rod (VWM216) and Pixie (VWM210) submitted to him multiple times following several dominance competitions this month.
- Spruddel (VZUF028) lost her litter this month, but Lil G (VZUF029) and Lentil (VZUF032) have both been given their official pregnancies this month.
- Following the dominance competitions and fights that occurred prior to dominance being decided, Pixie (VZUM210) suffered a leg injury and was seen to have a limp, while Jay-a-rod (VZUM216) suffered a head wound injury. Both appear to be healing well at the end of this month, and the rest of the group are in good health.

The following authors contributed to this report:

Siómha Campbell, Life History.
Zoe Turner, Life History Trainee.

Group Territories February 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.