



The Meerkatter

The Friends of the Kalahari Meerkat Project Report - www.kalahari-meerkats.com - November 2021

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Trackie-Daks in turmoil

At the end of October, Trackie-Daks was still a group of 16 meerkats. That number has since gone down to a mere 10. It is time for an update on everything that has been happening at this beloved habituation group.

Adult subordinate female Scarface (VTDF011) was evicted around the 19th of October. She was seen nearby later that morning but was clearly not acting as part of the group anymore. Around that time, the dominant female BB (VTDF010), was looking highly pregnant. We, therefore, believed Scarface might try to come back after BB gave birth. The latter, however, has not been seen with the group since the 26th of October. We waited two weeks before determining she had left, because she is a very skittish meerkat and we could not be entirely sure whether she had left or was nervous and hiding from observers. When she had not returned a month after her last sighting, she was given her Last Seen. We will probably never find out what exactly happened to her. The disappearance of BB from the group meant that Scarface would have stood a chance to return to the group without being evicted again by a pregnant dominant female. As she did not return, she has also been given a Last Seen. Neither have been transpondered, as they are too skittish to be captured. If they do resurface, it will be hard to identify them with certainty. Scarface, however, has a very distinct scar on her nose, so senior observers should be able to identify her in case she is ever found with another group of meerkats.

Sub-adult female Savakes (VTDF006) and littermate Ketje (VTDM007) have also been given their Last Seen after not being sighted for a month. Savakes was last seen with the group on the 30th of September and Ketje has not had any sightings after the 15th of October. Observers were quite disappointed by their disappearance as we were finally able to weigh Savakes after months of habituation work focused on getting her comfortable around the scales.



Six of the ten meerkats that remain at Trackie-Daks at the end of November. Photo credit: Zurich Manager Bieke Maex.

Adult subordinate male Sushi (VTSM006) was last seen at Trackie-Daks on the 21st of October and adult subordinate male Sketchy Bongo (VTSM019) on the 29th. Sushi had encounters with Make-e-Plan on the 2nd, 5th, 8th, 12th and 13th. On the 8th and 12th an unknown meerkat was sighted near the same group. As Sketchy Bongo is quite skittish, he is currently not marked. We cannot be sure he was the unknown individual, but it is highly likely. On the 20th of November, an observer saw Sushi foraging with Make-e-Plan and saw him go down the same sleeping burrow as the rest, which gave us enough proof that he had immigrated into the group. Sketchy Bongo was also seen during that session, but because he is so skittish, he was only seen briefly and from a distance. The next morning another senior observer went to the group and confirmed that it was indeed Sketchy Bongo who had also become part of Make-e-Plan. Sushi was remarkably comfortable during the afternoon session of the 20th and did not mind being followed while he was foraging. That is very good news, because Trackie-Daks is not yet at a habituation stage where they are being followed in the field. Sketchy Bongo, however, behaves just as skittishly at Make-e-Plan as he did at Trackie-Daks. That means Make-e-Plan's habituation has now changed to *Incomplete*. We hope being around well-habituated meerkats will have a positive impact on his habituation, but for now, we mainly see him run from one bolthole to the next or forage as far away from observers as possible.



Sketchy Bongo (VTSM019) who has left Trackie-Daks and immigrated to Make-e-Plan this month. Photo credit: meerkat volunteer Tara Naeser.

Sushi has been displaying dominance behaviours at Make-e-Plan and could potentially take over dominance now that the previous dominant male Banksia (VVHM117) has gone missing. His chances are improved by the fact that Make-e-Plan's eldest males; adult subordinates Thorn (VMPPM027), Maverick (VMPPM034), Kanyonyi (VMPPM036) and Doby (VMPPM037) have all been away from the group for more than a month. We have, however, not witnessed enough direct submissions to him yet to be able to confirm this. Moreover, as Sketchy Bongo's habituation level is very low, it is quite difficult to determine if observer presence may be impacting what behaviours are being witnessed between him and Sushi or if we are missing displays of dominance behaviour from Sketchy Bongo.

Back to Trackie-Daks; yearling subordinate male Jumper (VTSM017) is still part of the group but has been very busy in November. He left the group three times during the month, most recently on the 28th. On his forays, he was regularly spotted near other meerkat groups. He was clearly not always equally welcome, as he came back in a fairly bad state on the 21st. His right foot was swollen and he also had a serious genital injury. Both injuries have not healed yet.

With the two eldest females out of the picture, only yearling subordinate Fergalicious (VTSF020) and sub-adult Tara (VTDF001) remain. We have witnessed a few dominance competitions initiated by Tara, but she also got a few injuries that could have been inflicted by Fergalicious. She was seen limping, had some wounds on her chest and a swollen arm, but these injuries seemed to be healing.

Now that three of the four meerkats that need the most habituation work have disappeared or emigrated out of the group, our main focus lies on the dominant male Coquilette (VTSM014). He shifts between days where he barks at observers who come within 3 metres and other days where he drinks from the water bottle. He has even been weighed a few times. We have recently started doing burrow sits at the group, to habituate them to seeing observers in the evening as they return to their sleeping burrow for the night. It remains to be seen whether Coquilette's habituation will get a boost from not having his skittish group members around anymore. With Sushi being so comfortable with being followed

at Make-e-Plan, we are hopeful we can start follow habituation at Trackie-Daks when Coquilette shows improvement in his habituation levels.

Excitement at Elrond's Council

At the end of October, adult subordinate female Pippin (VECF003) gave birth, so we were all very much looking forward to welcoming new pups in November. The litter of four (VECP042, VECF043, VECF044 and VECF045) first emerged on the 12th, started foraging with the rest of the group on the 16th and had their first burrow move on the 17th. While an observer was there on the 18th, she saw VECF045 looking very weak and die shortly after. VECF044 was not looking well during that same session but was still alive when the observer left and was also seen the day after. That was, however, its last sighting and we assume it was predated. VECF043 has not been seen since the 21st and will be given a Last Seen if it does not reappear within 10 days. The first pup to be marked turned out to be the strongest one. VECF042 is the last one standing and seems to be doing really well.



VECF042, the only pup from adult subordinate female Pippin's (VECF003) litter that survived. Photo credit: meerkat volunteer Maddie Koeplin.

Around the end of October observers started noticing that the dominant female Galadriel (VECF032) was looking pregnant. An official pregnancy was created on the 10th. As per usual, subordinate females started being evicted or leaving the group shortly after. Adult subordinate female Orc (VECF012) was evicted on the 4th. Yearling subordinate female Tolkien (VECF019) left the group on the 5th. Yearling subordinate female Moos (VECF035) left on the 6th. Her littermate Kilie (VECF036) left once on the 6th, returned on the 11th and left again on the 20th. Pippin

was also probably evicted, leaving the group and her pups behind on the 13th.

The session we found the dying pup was a very tumultuous one. At one point, yearling subordinate female Calypso (VECF027) went down a bolt hole and came back up with a bloody wound on her right wrist. We are not sure what happened, but she was not looking well at all by the end of the morning session. Over the next few days, she took it easy as she had a limp caused by the injury. To everyone's relief, she has made a complete recovery. She is a well-loved meerkat for being a good babysitter, often protecting pups if we come too close to them.



Yearling subordinate female Calypso (VECF027) still caring for a pup minutes after getting injured. Photo credit: Meerkat Manager Doli Borah.

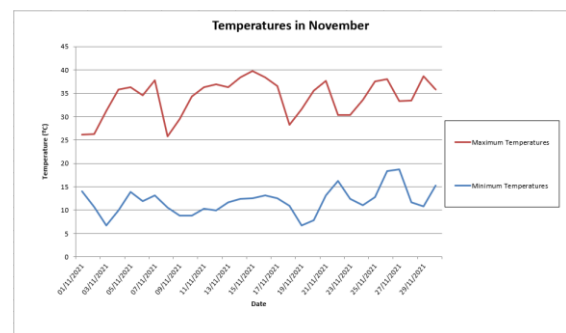
Adult subordinate males Langa (VZUM033), Arwen (VECM014) and Boromir (VECM016) left on a roving expedition on the 27th. They were sighted later that day when they tried to approach Make-e-Plan 4 but were chased away. On the 30th they also tried to approach Make-e-Plan several times.

The five missing females have possibly started a new group with adult subordinate male Jay-A-Rod (VWM216) from Zulus. The six meerkats were seen foraging together on the afternoon of the 25th. They were briefly joined by yearling subordinate male Bear (VZUM056) from Zulus the same day, but he was chased away and returned to his home group shortly after. An observer went back to follow the meerkats on the morning of the 26th, but we lost track of the group later that day. We normally consider a coalition of at least three dispersed individuals of mixed-sex a sub-group if they have been seen foraging and going below together for at least two days, so we cannot be sure whether they are a sub-group yet. We are doing regular burrow sweeps in the area where they were seen and send out observers regularly in the hopes of finding them again. If they are still together when we find them, we will aim to put a radio collar on one of them, so we can keep track of their movements. As all six meerkats come from data collection groups, we would be able to start data collection with them right away, which is a very exciting prospect.

Pregnancies in November 2021

Females pregnant in November	7
Females who aborted	0
Females who gave birth, litters lost	0
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	0
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	3
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	4

Weather at the KMP



We are slowly reaching very hot temperatures in the Northern Cape. The average maximum was 34.2 °C and the average minimum 11.9 °C. On the 15th temperatures rose to 39.7 °C. The 3rd was the coldest morning, with temperatures dropping to 6.7 °C. We had no rainfall in November.

November 2021 Life History Details

Elrond's Council:

- There were 17 out of 25 individuals present at the end of November.
- Adult subordinate female Pippin (VECF003) ended up having 4 pups. They first emerged on the 12th, started foraging with the group on the 16th and had their first move on the 17th. One pup (VECP045) died after looking very weak while an observer was with the group on the 18th. VECP044 was last sighted on the 19th and was given its Last Seen as it is assumed predated. VECP043 went missing around the 21st and will be given a Last Seen if it does not reappear within 10 days.
- Pippin left the group on the 13th and appeared once later that day. Adult subordinate female Orc (VECF012) was evicted on the 4th. Yearling subordinate female Tolkien (VECF019) left the group on the 5th. Yearling subordinate female Moos (VECF035) left on the 6th. Her littermate Kilie (VECF036) left once on the 6th, returned on the 11th and left again on the 20th. Adult subordinate males Langa (VZUM033), Arwen (VECM014) and Boromir (VECM016) left the group together on the 27th. They were sighted later that day when they tried to approach Make-



e-Plan 4 but were chased away. On the 30th they also tried to approach Make-e-Plan several times. All of them were still absent at the end of the month.

- The 5 missing females have been spotted together with adult subordinate male Jay-a-Rod (VWM216) from Zulus on the 25th and 26th. Had they woken up together one more day, we would have created a new subgroup, but they have not been seen since. We are doing regular burrow sweeps in the area where they were sighted, in the hopes of finding them again and putting a radio collar on an individual, so we have a way of keeping track of them. On the 25th they were briefly joined by yearling subordinate male Bear (VZUM056) from Zulus, but he was chased away and returned to his home group shortly after.
- The group had no encounters or inter-group interactions this month.
- They had one daily group split on the 2nd.
- Habituation is still considered *Incomplete*. Both Galadriel and Pippin are being weighed on a regular basis but are still not too comfortable with close follows while they are foraging. The rest of the individuals are fully habituated.
- All individuals appear to be in good health.

Gold Diggers:

- 21 out of 23 meerkats were present at Gold Diggers at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Cleo (VGDF013) gave birth on the 25th. We do not yet know how many pups she had.
- Adult subordinate female Meghan (VGDF018) and yearling subordinate female Shiva (VGDF021) both left on the 15th and are still absent from the group.
- Adult subordinate females Fleabag (VGDF005), Goldeneye (VGDF007) and Juliet (VGDF009) also left on the 15th. Goldeneye returned on the 26th. Fleabag and Juliet returned around the 28th. Yearling subordinate female Shelby (VGDF022) left on the 15th, appeared twice later that day and returned on the 28th. Yearling subordinate female Cosmic Owl (VGDF019) was evicted on the 17th and returned on the 23rd. Adult subordinate male James (VGDM011) did not wake up with the group on the 25th but returned the next morning.
- Gold Diggers had no encounters or inter-group interactions this month.
- One daily group split was observed on the 17th.
- Gold Diggers' habituation level is in *Advanced Progress* as almost all group members are marked, most individuals are weighable and quite comfortable with follows during the morning. The group is not always comfortable with being approached and followed during the afternoon, so that is where our current focus still lies.
- All individuals seem to be healthy.

Jaxx:

- There were 18 out of 25 members present at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Baloo (VJXF080) is pregnant.
- Adult subordinate females Elea (VJXF129) and Salamander (VJXF135) and yearling subordinate female Amanda Leigh Rose James (VJXF143) who left in October have not returned yet. Yearling subordinate males Nibs (VJXM137) and Cubby (VJXM138) have been away from the group since the 24th. Yearling subordinate female Enya (VJXF141) was evicted on the 4th. Yearling subordinate female Footprints (VJXF148) left twice and was absent at the end of the month.
- Sub-Adult female Gray (VJXF150) left on the 19th and returned the evening of the 20th. Adult subordinate male Rincewind (VJXM131) left and returned 4 times. On the 30th he was seen roving at Runaways. Cubby had already left once before, from the 19th until the 20th. Yearling subordinate male Tootles (VJXM139) left on the 24th and returned the next day. Yearling subordinate male Oliver (VJXM144) left and returned twice.
- Jaxx had encounters with an unknown meerkat on the 9th and the 23rd.
- They also had an inter-group interaction with an unknown group on the 3rd.
- No group splits were observed in November.
- All individuals seem to be in good health.

Lazuli:

- 9 out of 13 individuals were present at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Sigma (VLF230) gave birth on the 27th or 28th. We do not yet know how many pups she had.
- Adult subordinate females Haopia (VLF244) and Lennon (VLF246) are still away from the group. They are still regularly seen near Lazuli and they appeared on the 4th, 6th and 27th. They have not been accepted back yet. Adult subordinate male Slop (VLM253) is still roving. Adult subordinate male Shandy (VHMM023) has been away from the group since the 2nd.
- Shandy approached Lazuli on the 3rd, 4th and 8th. Yearling subordinate male Motek (VLM261) left on the 11th and returned the next day.
- Adult subordinate male Captain Barbosa (VLM265) left on the 11th and tried to approach Ubuntu multiple times later that day. By the 13th we were sure he had immigrated to Ubuntu.
- Lazuli had an inter-group interaction with Ubuntu on the 24th.
- No group splits were observed in November.
- Lazuli's habituation level is now considered *Complete*, because the one individual who still needed habituation work was Captain Barbosa, who has now immigrated to Ubuntu.
- All individuals at Lazuli seem to be in good health.



Make-e-Plan:

- The number of Make-e-Plan members dropped to 16. 1 individual is currently missing from the group.
- The dominant male Banksia (VVHM117), who went missing around 15/9 received his Last Seen. Adult subordinate males Thorn (VMPPM027), Maverick (VMPPM034), Kanyonyi (VMPPM036) and Doby (VMPPM037) have had no sightings in a month and have been moved into the group Unknown. Yearling subordinate female Fleegle (VMPPF051) left twice and was absent at the end of the month.
- Yearling subordinate female Bonxie (VMPPF054) was not seen with the group on the morning of the 20th and returned later that day. The dominant female Bridget (VQLF011) and sub-adult female Hollie (VMPPF058) were not seen during the morning session of the 29th but they had returned by the start of the afternoon session. Yearling subordinate male Mr. Scruff (VMPPM052) was away from the group for a few hours on the 12th after chasing an unknown rover away.
- Adult subordinate males Sushi (VTSM006) and Sketchy Bongo (VTSM019) from Trackie-Daks immigrated into the group at the end of the month.
- Before immigrating into the group, Sushi and Sketchy Bongo had several interactions with Make-e-Plan. Sushi was seen encountering Make-e-Plan on the 2nd, 5th, 8th, 12th and 13th. On the 8th and 12th, an unknown meerkat was sighted at the group. As Sketchy Bongo is quite skittish, he is currently not marked. We cannot be sure he was the unknown individual, but it is highly likely. Prior to his immigration being confirmed at the group, Sketchy Bongo was confidently identified by two senior volunteers familiar with him.
- There is a chance that one of the males from Trackie-Daks will take dominance. Due to Sketchy Bongo's particularly low habituation level, it may take some time to determine this. While Sushi has been seen showing some dominance behaviours, there has not been sufficient evidence to confirm his, and there is the chance observer presence is limiting sightings of behaviours from Sketchy Bongo.
- Make-e-Plan had additional encounters with former group members adult females Arabella (VMPPF035) and Vivienne (VMPPF038), who are now part of Make-e-Plan 4, on the 7th. Later that day, their new group member, yearling male Barney (VNQM018), also approached Make-e-Plan. Adult subordinate males Langa (VZUM033), Arwen (VECM014) and Boromir (VECM016) from Elrond's Council approached the group 4 times on the 30th.
- No inter-group interactions were observed this month.
- Make-e-Plan had 1 daily group split on the 18th.
- The arrival of Sketchy Bongo means that the habituation level at Make-e-Plan is now *Incomplete*. He is a very skittish individual and we often only see his head pop out of a bolthole every once in a while. We hope being around a

well habituated group will have a positive impact on his habituation. Sushi is doing remarkably well and was immediately comfortable with being followed while foraging.

- All individuals appear to be in good health.

Make-e-Plan 4:

- There were 3 out of 5 members present at the end of the month. Adult females Arabella (VMPPF035) and Vivienne (VMPPF038) both left the group on the 30th. Should the females not return within 30 days, the sub-group may be considered to have disbanded.
- Before that, the two females had already left once on the 7th. So did yearling male Barney (VNQM018).
- The group encountered adult subordinate males Langa (VZUM033), Arwen (VECM014) and Boromir (VECM016) from Elrond's Council on the 27th.
- Both female and male dominance are unsettled in the group. Arabella and Vivienne are still regularly observed to be competing for dominance.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were observed.
- All individuals at Make-e-Plan 4 seem to be in good health.

Namaqua:

- All 9 meerkats were present at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Manzai (VNQF013) gave birth on the 29th or 30th. We do not yet know how many pups she had.
- No individual encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were observed in November.
- Yearling subordinate female Hiccup (VNQF016) still has tuberculosis symptoms. Her left and right sub-mandibular lumps have become so large that they are now touching and look like a single large lump of about 8*4cm. She is starting to look more emaciated and has sometimes been observed coughing. The last time she was seen she also had fluid coming out of her ear. No other Namaqua meerkats are showing signs of TB.

Phoenix

- The only identifiable individual, the radio-collared yearling female Pinky (VPHF001), was last seen with 13 to 15 unmarked individuals mid-November. Since then, we have been having issues finding the group. We believe Pinky may have been evicted from the group and is too nervous to come up with an observer around. We have been getting radio collar signals from different burrows, so she is definitely alive and moving around, but we have not been seeing any meerkats. We will keep tracking her regularly to check whether she finds other meerkats to join or whether she returns back to Phoenix.
- Should the rest of Phoenix be found, we will aim to conduct cage-trapping at the group to collar a



different individual and reduce the chance of losing them again.

Runaways:

- There were 9 out of 12 members present at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Bigwig (VMPF022) is pregnant.
- Adult subordinate females Cirilla (VMPF026) and Hope (VMPF029) are still missing from the group. Adult subordinate female Scylla (VMPF025) left between the 13th and 27th and is still absent. We could not access the group for some time, so we cannot be sure when she left exactly.
- The group encountered adult subordinate male Rincewind (VJXM131) from Jaxx on the 30th.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were seen this month.
- All individuals appear to be in good health.

Side Quest:

- There were 8 out of 9 meerkats present at the end of November.
- The dominant female Pumba (VZUF048) is pregnant.
- The 3 pups (VSIP007, VSIP008, VSIP009) that went missing between the morning and afternoon sessions on 24/10 did not come back to the group and were given their Last Seen. Adult subordinate female Timon (VZUF049) left on the 5th, came back 3 hours later, and was immediately evicted, remaining absent at the end of the month.
- Side Quest had an encounter with an unknown meerkat on the 24th.
- No inter-group-interactions or group splits were seen this month.
- All individuals seem to be healthy.

Trackie-Daks:

- The total group number went down from 16 to 10. 9 members were present at the end of the month.
- Dominant female BB (VTDF010), adult subordinate female Scarface (VTDF011), sub-adult female Savakes (VTDF006) and littermate Ketje (VTDM007) have all been given their Last Seen after not being sighted for a month. Adult subordinate males Sushi (VTSM006) and Sketchy Bongo (VTSM019) immigrated into Make-e-Plan.
- Yearling subordinate male Jumper (VTSM017) left the group 3 times this month, most recently on the 28th, remaining absent at the end of the month. On his forays, he was spotted roving at Ubuntu 5 times.
- There were no individual encounters, inter-group interactions, or group splits observed this month.
- Trackie-Daks' habituation level is *In Progress*. With 3 of the 4 most skittish individuals gone, our focus now lies on dominant male Coquette (VTSM014), who still needs a lot of habituation work. We have started doing burrow sits at the group now, to let them get used to seeing observers in the evening, before they go below.

- All individuals appear to be healthy, except for Jumper, who came back with a serious genital injury and a swollen foot after roving at Ubuntu and Tara who has minor injuries that were still present at the end of the month.

Zulus:

- There were 11 out of 13 individuals present at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate male Jay-A-Rod (VWM216) is still absent. So is yearling subordinate male Godric (VZUM053), who left on the 30th.
- Jay-A-Rod has been spotted with Pippin (VECF003), Orc (VECF012), Tolkien (VECF019), Moos (VECF035) and Kilie (VECF036) from Elrond's Council on the 25th and 26th. Had they woken up together one more day, we would have created a new subgroup, but they have not been seen since. We are doing regular burrow sweeps in the area where they were sighted, in the hopes of finding them again and putting a radio collar on an individual, so we have a way of keeping track of their activities and movements. On the 25th they were briefly joined by yearling subordinate male Bear (VZUM056), but he was chased away and returned to the rest of the group shortly after.
- No individual encounters or inter-group interactions were observed this month.
- Zulus had one group split of uncertain duration.
- All individuals appear to be healthy.

The following authors contributed to this report:

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