



The Meerkatter

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

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Sub-group Summer

With summer in full swing, we are observing plenty of meerkat movements. Some of the evicted females and roving males on our reserve have crossed paths and are trying their luck away from their home groups.

As mentioned in the October Meerkatter, Make-e-Plan 4 was formed at the end of November. The group consisted of adult females Arabella (VMPF035) and Vivienne (VMPF038) from Make-e-Plan and adult male Zuko (VNQM012) and yearling males Barney (VNQM018) and Cooper (VNQM019) from Namaqua. Radio collars were put on two of the males and we immediately started data collection at the group. Except for the incessant stream of dominance competition behaviours between the two females, things seemed peaceful and uneventful at Make-e-Plan 4. However, when an observer visited them on the 30th of November, he only found the three males and the uncollared females appeared to have left.

Over the next twelve days, we regularly saw the males, but lost sight of the females, as we had no way of tracking them. We found them again on the 11th of December and were surprised to see they had formed a new coalition. They had been joined by three roving adult males, namely Shandy (VHMM023) and Slop (VLM253) from Lazuli, and Gurke (VHMM036) from Hakuna Matata. Slop left the group again around the 18th and immigrated back into Lazuli on the 29th. Gurke briefly left the group from the 19th until the 24th.

Shandy displayed a lot of dominance behaviours, mainly by anal marking boltholes and sleeping burrows. He had already received submissions from Slop before he left. As Shandy was temporarily the only male at the group and because Gurke did not compete with him for dominance, he was declared the dominant male of the group. Female dominance has been unsettled ever since the group was first found, with Arabella and Vivienne still showing plenty of dominance competition behaviours. Some observers are rooting for Vivienne, because the meerkat has already overcome quite a few hurdles in

her life. The hardy female survived two Puff Adder bites, the most recent one last winter.

As the three former Namaqua males have not been sighted near Make-e-Plan 4 for a month and clearly are not part of the group anymore, they have been moved to the group Unknown.

With the group consisting of meerkats from three different groups, used to three different foraging areas, they are clearly still trying to decide on a new territory. They have been sighted across a wide area from the 'Big Dune' towards the centre of the reserve, across to the Eastern perimeter fence line, and beyond on to our neighbouring farm, Leeupan.

Normally, we would make the sub-group an official group as soon as they have been together for two months or breed successfully. As observers believe both Arabella and Vivienne might be pregnant, that day might not be too far off anymore.



Pippin (VECF003), the dominant female at Elrond's Council 2, who joined the group after leaving Elrond's Council. Photo credit: meerkat volunteer Tristan Silver.



Make-e-Plan 4 is not the only sub-group to have been formed recently. At the time of writing of the previous Meerkatter, we had just spotted adult subordinate females Pippin (VECF003) and Orc (VECF012) and yearling subordinate females Tolkien (VECF019), Moos (VECF035) and Kilie (VECF036) from Elrond's Council with adult subordinate male Jay-A-Rod (VWM216) from Zulus. Unfortunately, we lost track of the six meerkats the day after and could not find them for a few days. When we found them still together on the 7th of December, we were sure we could call them a new sub-group, namely *Elrond's Council 2*. By then, they had also been joined by subordinate yearling male Godric (VZUM053) from Zulus. We were able to radio collar Jay-A-Rod on the 8th and have been able to follow the group and collect data ever since.

We could declare Pippin and Jay-a-Rod the new dominants on the very day we found the group again. Pippin received submissions from more than half of the other females in the group and Godric was observed submitting to Jay-A-Rod. No individuals have left the group since, and the group composition seems to be stable for now. They have settled on a territory exactly in-between where Elrond's Council and Zulus generally forage.

Observers have been confused about the pregnancy status of every single female in the group, opinions ranging from possibly pregnant to definitely pregnant, to not pregnant at all. We are curious to see what the future holds for these seven meerkats.

Side Quest Update

At the end of December, Side Quest consisted of eleven individuals – four more than when they were first found in May. Here is an update on the lesser known but well-loved group roaming on the Northern perimeter.

Their territory is covered in scenic, high undulating dunes that can work to a tracker's advantage, but also make tracking a challenge when the group is a long way from a road or their most recent burrow. The area is mostly unexplored by the previously studied meerkat groups, which means many of the burrows that Side Quest use are new, and they change burrows fairly frequently when there are no pups in a burrow that they need to return to. It has been interesting to observe the expansion of the area in which they forage to the North and North-east of the reserve and onto our neighbouring farm; Lonely.

Side Quest are serious about breeding, having produced three litters over the past six months under the dominant female Pumba (VZUF048). The first litter was born on the 2nd of July. Two pups emerged on the 21st and 23rd of July, increasing the member count to nine. The two pups foraged for the first time on the 29th of July, but only one pup – now juvenile female Brie (VSIF005) survived up until now. Brie is known as one of the cuter new meerkats in the population, who was pup fed non-stop during the early stages, leading to her quick growth and her

being almost as large as her four slightly older group members. Pumba became officially pregnant again on the 3rd of September and gave birth to three pups on the 19th. Unfortunately, none of them made it past thirty-five days. Most recently, the third Side Quest litter of the year was born on the 12th of December. The litter consisted of three pups – all of which are still alive at the time of writing.

The group seems to put a large amount of effort into babysitting, and Timon was particularly good when she was present. The four sub-adults have been pulling their weight as babysitters, as they have been witnessed spending many hours at a time at the burrow, during the days when pups have been below. They are still learning the ropes, however, as an observer saw the sub-adults trying to pick up and carry the pups of the most recent litter, but they seemed quite clumsy and unsure about what to do exactly.

The group lives a rather peaceful life, having only encountered two meerkats over the course of six months according to our records. The first one was with adult subordinate male Langa (VZUM033) from Elrond's Council. They saw him on the 6th of November, and promptly chased him away. The second encounter happened on the 24th of November when an unknown individual was met with Side Quest's war-dancing and was chased away.

There have not been many group movements at Side Quest, with most of the action being centered around adult subordinate female Timon (VZUF049). She left the group on the 5th of November, and returned after three hours, only to be evicted by Pumba just minutes later. She remained absent from Side Quest for almost seven weeks, making multiple appearances near the group during that time. She finally returned on the 20th, shortly after Pumba's most recent birth.



Dominant female Pumba (VZUF048) and the three pups from her current litter at Side Quest. Photo credit: meerkat volunteer Lila Chillingworth.

A strange situation occurred on the 5th of December when the group was observed to be all well during the morning session but had split up by the start of the afternoon session. Only the dominant male Legolas (VECM009) was found alongside evicted female Timon. The rest of the group, which included the dominant female Pumba, was not seen again until the afternoon of the 7th, because Legolas had



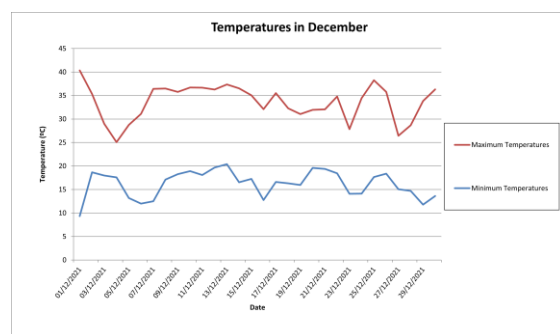
the radio collar and therefore, the group could not be tracked. In the meantime, Legolas and Timon also lost track of each other. The male moved from bolthole to bolthole during the day, making sporadic foraging forays and moving around the territory, trying to find the rest of the group members. He then tried to return to the group multiple times, but the group would often alarm, war dance and chase him, leading to him retreating. His perseverance eventually paid off and he was finally accepted back into the group on the 10th of December. During the forays of Legolas, a radio collar was placed on sub-adult male (VSIM001) to keep track of the movements of the group.

Observers are hoping for the group to be successful at raising their current set of pups, and seeing the group grow in the coming months.

Pregnancies in December 2021

Females pregnant in December	10
Females who aborted	0
Females who gave birth, litters lost	0
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	2
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	2
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	6

Weather at the KMP



The average maximum temperature was 33.7 °C and the average minimum temperature was 16.1 °C. On the 1st temperatures rose to the highest recorded temperature this month of 40.3 °C. The 1st was also the coldest morning, with temperatures dropping to 9.3 °C. We had 73.6mm of rain in December.

December 2021 Life History Details

Elrond's Council:

- Group numbers increased to 22 meerkats at the end of December.
- Dominant female Galadriel (VECF032) gave birth on the 8th. 4 pups emerged on the 29th.

Yearling subordinate male Baggins (VECM017) was found dead on Botswana road on the 24th.

- One of the pups of former adult subordinate female Pippin (VECF003) was given its Last Seen on the 2nd after being absent from the group for 10 days.
- Yearling subordinate female Calypso (VECF027), yearling subordinate males Pucky (VECM023) and Milo (VECM034) and pup Survivor (VECM042) all left and returned in December. Adult subordinate male Langa (VZUM033) left the group several times and was seen roving at Namaqua on the 6th. He was with Elrond's Council again by the end of the month.
- The group had no encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits this month.
- Habituation is still considered *Incomplete*. Galadriel is being weighed on a regular basis but is still not too comfortable with close follows while she is foraging. The rest of the individuals are fully habituated.
- All individuals appear to be in good health.

Elrond's Council 2:

- 7 meerkats were present in the group at the end of the month.
- After their first sighting together at the end of November, adult females Pippin (VECF003) and Orc (VECF012) and yearling females Tolkien (VECF019), Moos (VECF035) and Kilie (VECF036) from Elrond's Council were found again on the 7th with adult male Jay-A-Rod (VWM216) from Zulus. By then, yearling male Godric (VZUM053) had joined them as well.
- We managed to radio collar Jay-A-Rod and we were able to collect data at the group immediately.
- If this sub-group stays together for at least 2 months, they will officially be considered a new group.
- Dominance was settled quickly, with Pippin and Jay-A-Rod being the new pair in charge.
- No individual encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were observed in December.
- Habituation at the group is *Incomplete*. Pippin is being weighed on a regular basis but is still not too comfortable with close follows while she is foraging. The rest of the individuals are fully habituated.
- All individuals appear healthy.

Gold Diggers:

- 21 out of 22 meerkats were present at Gold Diggers at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Cleo (VGDF013) was missing from the group at the end of the month.
- She gave birth at the end of November. Her 3 pups (VGDU035, VGDU036 and VGDU037) first emerged on the 16th, but have been given their Last Seen after not being sighted with the group for 10 days.
- Adult subordinate female Meghan (VGDF018) was given her Last Seen after being away from the group since the beginning of November. She did not return to the group with the other evicted females after Cleo gave birth. Adult subordinate



male James (Sawyer) (VGDM011) left on the 31st and has not returned yet.

- Adult subordinate female Juliet (VGDF009), yearling subordinate male Beatrice (VGDM015) and yearling subordinate females Shelby (VGDF022) and Corrugation (VGDF023) all left and returned in December.
- Gold Diggers had an encounter with an unknown adult meerkat on the 11th and another one with 3 unknown meerkats on the 18th.
- Gold Diggers had no inter-group interactions this month.
- They had one daily group split on the 13th.
- Gold Diggers' habituation level is in *Advanced Progress* as almost all group members are marked, most individuals are weighable and quite comfortable with follows. We are hoping to make them a full data collection group soon.
- All individuals seem to be healthy.

Hakuna Matata:

- We are not sure how many individuals are currently present at Hakuna Matata. The group was last sighted on the 2nd and has been on the Heights farm since. We are regularly checking their known territory, so we can start following the group again as soon as they return to our reserve.
- On the 2nd, adult subordinate females Shenzi (VHMF038), Azizi (VHMF039) and Zahra (VHMF040) were missing from the group. Azizi had returned by the 8th, when she was briefly sighted with some other group members on the main road. Adult subordinate male Luther (VLM245) was also absent from the group, as he was last seen roving at Whiskers on the 6th.
- No individual encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were observed in December.
- All individuals appeared healthy when they were last seen.

Jaxx:

- There were 16 out of 24 members present at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Baloo (VJXF080) gave birth on the 22nd or 23rd. We do not yet know how many pups she had.
- Adult subordinate female Elea (VJXF129) briefly returned and left again. She was absent at the end of the month, together with adult subordinate female Salamander (VJXF135), yearling subordinate females Enya (VJXF141), Amanda Leigh Rose James (VJXF143), Tuna Fish (VJXF145) and Footprints (VJXF148) and sub-adult female Lord Kinbote (VJXM151). Adult subordinate male Cubby (VJXM138) was also absent at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate male Nibs (VJXM137) has had no sightings since the end of November and was moved into the group Unknown.
- Sub-adult female Gray (VJXF150) left on the 9th and woke up with the group the next morning. She was then evicted with her littermate Scully (VJXF149) on the 17th. Both were accepted back on the 24th. Yearling subordinate male The Dude (VJXM142) left and returned once. Adult

subordinate male Rincewind (VJXM131) left and returned twice. Adult subordinate male Tootles (VJXM139) left and returned 3 times.

- Jaxx had an encounter with an unknown meerkat on the 1st and another with 3 unknown meerkats on the 6th. On the 11th they encountered 3 unknown meerkats and then had 2 more encounters with 2 unknown meerkats.
- No inter-group interactions were observed this month.
- Jaxx had 2 group splits over several days, but of uncertain duration.
- All individuals seem to be in good health.

Lazuli:

- All 14 individuals were present at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Sigma (VLF230) gave birth at the end of November. 4 pups emerged on the 22nd, started foraging with the group on the 24th and had their first burrow move on the 27th.
- Adult subordinate females Haopia (VLF244) and Lennon (VLF246) have been moved into the group Unknown. They have been evicted since the end of October, but have appeared near the group several times since, including twice on the 11th of this month. We will give them a bit more time to see whether they will return now that Sigma has given birth. Adult subordinate male Shandy (VHMM023) immigrated into Make-e-Plan 4 around the 11th.
- Adult subordinate male Slop (VLM253) briefly joined the new sub-group Make-e-Plan 4 but has been back with Lazuli since the 29th.
- No individual encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were observed this month.
- All individuals at Lazuli seem to be in good health.

Make-e-Plan:

- We are not sure how many individuals are currently present at Make-e-Plan. The radio-collared yearling subordinate male Priscilla (VMPM046) was first found away from the group on the 7th. We are doing regular burrow sweeps to find the rest of the group.
- At the end of November, yearling subordinate female Fleegle (VMPF051) was absent from the group. Priscilla was seen with yearling subordinate males Mr Scruff (VMPM052) and Thimbletack (VMPM053). Mr Scruff and Thimbletack were seen roving at Namaqua 3 times, and Priscilla was seen 5 times. On the 8th an observer spotted yearling subordinate females Dusty (VMPF047) and Millewa (VMPF048) by themselves. We do not know if any of them have since returned to the group.
- The group had an encounter with former Make-e-Plan 4 males Zuko (VNQM012), Barney (VNQM018) and Cooper (VNQM019) on the 11th.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were observed this month.
- If adult male Sketchy Bongo (VTSM019), who immigrated from Trackie-Daks in November, is



still part of the group when we find them again, the habituation level at Make-e-Plan would be *Incomplete* and the group will likely become a habituation group until his habituation levels improve. 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.

- All individuals appeared to be in good health when they were last seen.

Make-e-Plan 4:

- All 4 members were present at the end of the month. Adult females Arabella (VMPPF035) and Vivienne (VMPPF038), originally from Make-e-Plan, are still part of the group. Adult male Zuko (VNQM012) and yearling males Barney (VNQM018) and Cooper (VNQM019), who left Namaqua to join them, left on the 30th of November. They have since been replaced by adult males Shandy (VHMM023) from Lazuli and Gurke (VHMM036) from Hakuna Matata. They were also briefly joined by adult male Slop (VLM253) from Lazuli, but he has returned to his home group again on the 29th.
- Shandy is the new dominant male at the group. Female dominance is still unsettled. Arabella and Vivienne are still regularly observed to be competing for dominance.
- Gurke left the group around the 19th and returned by the 24th.
- No encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were observed.
- All individuals at Make-e-Plan 4 seem to be in good health.

Namaqua:

- The total number of meerkats increased to 13.
- The dominant female Manzai (VNQF013) gave birth at the end of November. The 4 pups first emerged on the 23rd, moved burrows on the 25th and started foraging with the group on the 28th.
- Namaqua had several encounters with roving males from Make-e-Plan: 3 with Mr Scruff (VMPM052) and Thimbletack (VMPM053) and 6 with Priscilla (VMPM046). They also encountered Langa (VZUM033) from Elrond's Council on the 6th.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were observed in December.
- Yearling subordinate female Hiccup (VNQF016) still has tuberculosis symptoms. Her submandibular lump has burst and has fluid coming out. She has become very emaciated and quite fatigued.
- No other Namaqua meerkats are showing signs of TB.

Phoenix

- 15 unmarked individuals were present at the end of the month. The only identifiable individual, the radio-collared yearling female Pinky (VPHF001), is still evicted from the group. However, we have been quite successful at finding the group without a collar. We hope she is accepted back into the group soon.

- No encounters or interactions were witnessed this month.
- The group's habituation status is still *In Progress*. On most days observers are tolerated at 2-5m.
- All individuals at Phoenix appear to be healthy.

Runaways:

- The group decreased from 12 to 9 meerkats, and 8 were present at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Bigwig (VMPPF022) gave birth on the 15th. We do not yet know how many pups she had.
- The adult subordinate females Scylla (VMPPF025), Cirilla (VMPPF026) and Hope (VMPPF029) were all given their Last Seen, as they have been missing for over a month, and they have not returned since Bigwig gave birth.
- Adult subordinate male Grigio (VJXM126) left and returned on the 14th. He left again around the 17th and has been absent since then.
- No individual encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were seen this month.
- All individuals seem to be in good health.

Side Quest:

- The size of the group increased to 11, and they were all present at the end of December.
- The dominant female Pumba (VZUF048) gave birth to 3 pups on the 12th. They first emerged on the 29th.
- The dominant male Legolas (VECM009) left around the 7th and appeared multiple times between then and the 10th when he returned. Adult subordinate female Timon (VZUF049) returned on the 20th, after being evicted previously.
- There were no individual encounters, inter-group interactions, or group splits observed during the month.
- All individuals appear to be healthy.

Trackie-Daks:

- Trackie-Daks increased in member count from 10 to 12, 10 of which were present at the end of the month.
- Yearling subordinate female Fergalicious (VTSF020) and sub-adult female Tara (VTDF001) left around the 6th, returned on around the 12th, and left again around the 14th. They were both still absent at the end of the month.
- Yearling subordinate male Jumper (VTSM017) emigrated to Ubuntu on the 22nd. He left and returned twice during the month and was already seen roving at Ubuntu before immigrating into the group.
- On the 6th an observer discovered that 3 Whiskers females had immigrated, namely adult subordinate female Bel-hurricane (VWF231) and yearling subordinate females Fly (VWF237) and Hachi (VWF238). The yearlings were both pregnant at the end of the month. Observers witnessed submission from them to Bel-



Hurricane, which makes her the new dominant female of the group.

- Yearling subordinate males Petit Lu (VTSM011) and Marvin Gaye (VTSM021) left on the 2nd and returned on the 3rd.
- There were no individual encounters, inter-group interactions, or group splits observed this month.
- The habituation level is currently *In Progress*. Focus is on dominant male Coquette (VTSM014) who still needs a lot of habituation work. Adult subordinate Jiminy Cricket (VTSM007) still needs habituation work too. Attention has also been given to yearling subordinate males Marvin Gaye (VTSM021) and Moon Moon (VTSM022) who have been less comfortable with being weighed lately. We hope that with the immigration of the three well-habituated females from Whiskers, they can positively influence the habituation of those males that need the most work.
- All individuals appear to be healthy.

Ubuntu:

- Ubuntu now has 15 members, 4 of whom were absent at the end of the month.
- Jumper (VTSM017) immigrated from Trackie-Daks into Ubuntu on the 24th, and the only male of the group, Captain Barbosa, submitted to him immediately, making Jumper the new dominant male at Ubuntu.
- Yearling subordinate males Thulani (VUBM036), Scarboi Jnr (VUBM038), and sub-adult males Errie (VUBM041) and Chad (VUBM042) left on the 20th and were still absent at the end of the month.
- Magali, Mameuf, yearling subordinate female Cthulhu (VUBF035) and yearling subordinate female Agazoth (VUBF039) left and returned during the month.
- Dominant female Daisy (VBBF111), adult subordinate females Magali (VUBF023), Mameuf (VUBF026) were pregnant at the end of the month.
- Before becoming dominant at Ubuntu, Jumper was encountered on the 13th and 22nd. Adult male subordinate Shandy (VHMM023) from Lazuli was encountered on the 2nd.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were observed during the month.
- Habituation is still considered to be *Incomplete*. Habituation of Captain Barbosa is continuing. He is still not comfortable with observers following him at a close distance, but he is consistently weighable. Jumper was comfortable from the very day he immigrated, and we have already managed to successfully collect sound recordings on him.
- All individuals appear to be in good health, except for Daisy and Jumper. Daisy had severe injuries on her face and neck, most of which healed or scabbed by the end of the month. Jumper still had a torn scrotum and a swollen foot at the end of the month.

Whiskers:

- Whiskers now has 15 individuals that were all present at the end of the month.

- Adult subordinate female Bel-Hurricane (VWF231), and yearling subordinate females Fly (VWF237) and Hachi (VWF238) left around the 3rd. They were then first sighted at Trackie-Daks on the 6th, where they have immigrated.
- Adult subordinate female Luna (VWF235), sub-adult female Flake (VWF247), sub-adult female Chomp (VWF251), and adult male subordinate Lupin (VWM234) left and returned during the month. Luna was also evicted twice and returned both times. Subordinate yearling female Laika (VWF236) was also evicted and returned during the month.
- Luna was pregnant at the end of the month.
- The group encountered Luther (VLM245) from Hakuna Matata on the 10th.
- No inter-group interactions were observed this month.
- No group splits were observed during the month.
- All individuals at Whiskers seem to be healthy.

Zulus:

- There were 9 out of 11 individuals present at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Spruddel (VZUF028) was pregnant at the end of the month.
- Yearling subordinate female Salazar (VZUF051) left around the 13th. She appeared at the sleeping burrow that evening but was chased away by Spruddel. Yearling subordinate female Rowena (VZUF054) left on the 20th. Both were still absent at the end of the month.
- No individual encounters or inter-group interactions were observed this month.
- No group splits were observed during the month.
- All individuals at Zulus appear to be healthy.

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