



The Meerkatter

The Friends of the Kalahari Meerkat Project Report - www.kalahari-meerkats.com - January 2022

<i>Ultimate Ubuntu Update.....</i>	<i>1-2</i>	<i>Weather at the KMP.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Life and Death at Namaqua.....</i>	<i>2-3</i>	<i>Life History Details.....</i>	<i>3-6</i>
<i>Pregnancies in January</i>	<i>3</i>		

Ultimate Ubuntu Update

A lot has happened at Ubuntu since they became TV stars and started appearing on Meerkat Manor. The group is currently 14 individuals strong and has provided observers with plenty of entertainment over the course of the last few months.

The former dominant male Scar (VUBM021) disappeared from the group at the end of April 2021 and received his Last Seen a month later. Dominance was unsettled for quite some time, while yearling subordinate males Stanislas (VUBM029) and Mr. Worldwide (VUBM031) competed to take over his reign. Dominance was finally settled in August, when more than half of the mature males at Ubuntu submitted to Mr. Worldwide.

Mr. Worldwide was first seen as a little pup in January 2020. Ubuntu had a litter of four pups at the time that emerged on the 11th. All individuals were marked and started foraging with the group the next day. Only on the 19th, Mr. Worldwide was first spotted as a previously unnoticed pup. Observers at the time were never entirely sure whether he had been left behind without babysitters while his littermates were already foraging for several days or whether he was actually stolen from another group. We do not have a conclusive answer to this question yet, as we are still awaiting the results from his DNA analysis.

Mr. Worldwide left Ubuntu in November, together with yearling subordinate males Stanislas (VUBM029), Rowdy (VUBM032) and Stitch (VUBM033). As there has been no sign of them for two months, they were given their Last Seen in January. His departure meant that the position of dominant male was up for grabs again. On the 11th of November, Ubuntu had several encounters with adult subordinate male Captain Barbosa (VLM265) from Lazuli. On the 13th he woke up at the Ubuntu sleeping burrow and was acting like part of the group. This well-loved, shy Lazuli male is a favourite amongst observers, who have spent a long time working on his habituation. He was first seen at Lazuli with the group's current dominant male Odin (VLM266) in April 2020, when they immigrated as two wild meerkats. It has taken more than a year and a lot of hard work, but we are currently able to weigh and

follow both males in the field. They mainly still need microphone habituation but have come a long way since they first appeared. When Captain Barbosa left Lazuli to move into Ubuntu, everyone was hoping he would be able to take over dominance. However, he never seemed to receive enough direct submissions from the other males to make it official.

On the same day that Captain Barbosa immigrated, another rover started appearing at the group, namely adult subordinate male Jumper (VTSM017) from Trackie- Daks. He was even observed mating with the dominant female Daisy (VBBF111) that day. He came and went several times over the course of the next five weeks and officially immigrated into Ubuntu on the 24th of December 2021. By then, the remaining subordinate males, yearlings Thulani (VUBM036) and Scarboi Jnr (VUBM038), and sub-adults Errie (VUBM041) and Chad (VUBM042), had left to go roving. Captain Barbosa immediately submitted to Jumper, making Jumper the new dominant male on the very day he became part of the group. Even though Captain Barbosa displayed submissive behaviour right away, the males still had a few violent fights. On the 13th of January 2022 observers witnessed Captain Barbosa attacking Jumper and Jumper retaliating. By the end of the session Jumper had a tear in his ear, a cut behind his ear and wounds under his chin. Captain Barbosa was worse off with a swollen, bleeding lip, missing bottom teeth and part of his bottom jaw that looked like it had been torn off. We were very worried this would affect his ability to forage and eat but he seems to have made a miraculous recovery and is able to sustain himself despite his severe condition.

In better news, four meerkats at Ubuntu gave birth in January, which will hopefully increase group numbers again, after eight males have left over the course of the past three months. Daisy gave birth on the 2nd and adult subordinate female Mameuf (VUBF026) on the 11th. Adult subordinate female Magali (VUBF023) gave birth on the 18th or 19th and yearling subordinate female Cthulhu (VUBF035) on the 20th or 21st. On the 25th we saw a first pup and on the 26th another two. These pups were already relatively big and are believed to be about three weeks old, which means they would be Daisy's litter. Observers have reported hearing more pups down the burrow, so we are all anxiously awaiting their



emergence. Ubuntu seem to be taking their babysitting duties very seriously, regularly leaving two to four babysitters behind. If all four females have successful litters, Ubuntu could soon have (almost) as many pups as adult group members!



Dominant male Jumper (VTSM017) with two of the new pups born to dominant female Daisy (VBBF111). Photo credit: Zurich Manager Bieke Maex.

Life and death at Namaqua

On the 21st we said a sad farewell to yearling subordinate female Hiccup (VNQF016) at Namaqua. She had been suffering from tuberculous for several months and was found dead on the road as observers were coming back from a morning session with the group. It was presumed she died early morning as her body was already very stiff. She showed no signs of being hit by a vehicle and there was blood coming from her submandibular lump.

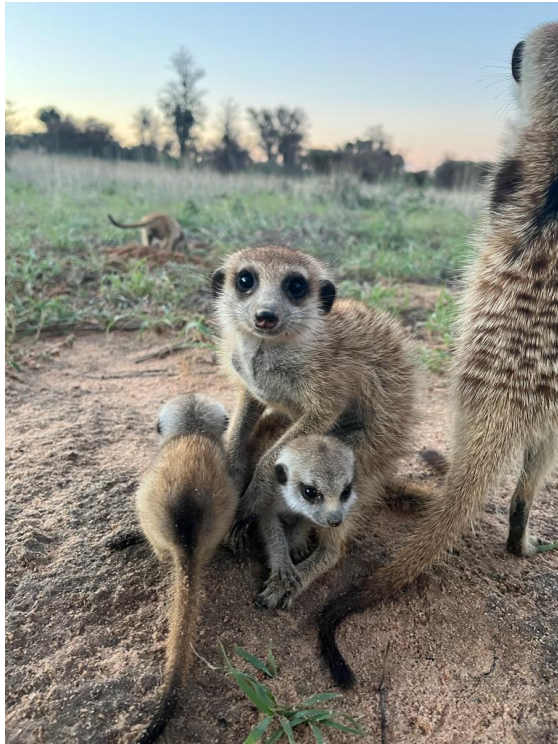
Signs of Hiccup's tuberculosis started on the 27th of September 2021 with a submandibular lump 0.5cm in size being reported on her right side. During the course of her decline this submandibular lump was joined by another on her left side. These were reported as being 2.5cm by 4cm on her right side and 2 cm by 3 cm on her left side, before combining together to form one large lump going from ear to ear under her neck by the end of November. It was around this time her body condition started to deteriorate as she was being reported as skinny and emaciated. On the 9th of December, raw patches began to appear on the submandibular lump and fluid began to leak from it. This resulted in a hole appearing in the center of the submandibular lump on the 17th of December and by the 22nd the submandibular lump was no longer being reported as it had drained away. This provided observers with a small amount of relief that the draining of her lump

may have eased some of Hiccup's discomfort. From this point onwards she proceeded to become exceedingly skinny and fatigued. The last time she was seen, she was described as skinny and fatigued, still had the hole in her neck and protruding bones. The last time her weight peaked, was on the 11th of November, when she was reported as weighing 652g. By the end of January that had gone down to a mere 450g. When the news broke of her death, observers were sad to see such a beloved meerkat go but were also quite relieved to know that her suffering had ended. She was a delight to weigh and a generally "sweet" meerkat. She shall be missed by observers.



Yearling subordinate female Hiccup (VNQF016) with submandibular tuberculosis lumps. Photo credit: Zurich Manager Bieke Maex

Now onto a more cheery note. On the 30th of November, the dominant female Manzaï (VNQF013) gave birth, resulting in four new additions to Namaqua (VNQM030, VNQF031, VNQF032, VNQF033). The four pups had their first emerge on the 23rd of December and started foraging with the group for the first time on the 28th. These cheeky bundles of joy have been sexed as one male and three females. They are yet to receive their names. Their pup habituation has been a flying success so far with all the pups being good with hands, being weighed and taking egg and water.



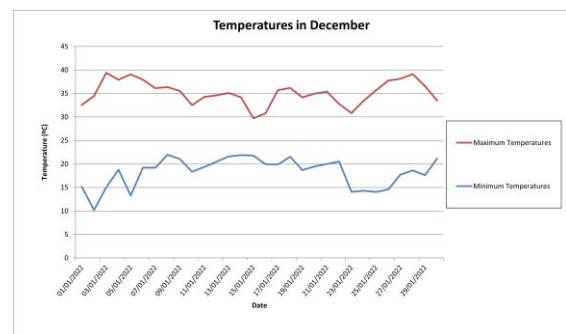
Yearling subordinate male Sidney (VMPM059) with two pups of the newest Namaqua litter. Photo credit: Life History Coordinator Trainee Lila Chillingworth.

On the 3rd of January 2022 adult subordinate female Mononoke Hime (VNQF014) was officially stated as pregnant. Her pregnancy coincided with Manzaï's pups foraging with the group, which meant we could start doing generosity focals at the group for Shay Rotics' research. In the preliminary results of his study, Rotics showed that a dominant female is less likely to be generous to a foraging litter if she herself is pregnant. The purpose of these focals is to see if the same applies to a subordinate female (will they be less generous whilst they are pregnant). This is the first time this breeding season that these circumstances have occurred where a litter is foraging whilst a subordinate female is pregnant. Observers were excited to have a change to the routine with these focals going on at Namaqua. Sadly, a few days after Mononoke Hime gave birth near the end of the month, it became clear that her litter was lost before emergence. The birth occurred at the expected time, but she was only lactating for one day and the group left no babysitters behind. It is always sad for observers to see meerkats lose their pups. However, a new pregnancy was created for Manzaï on the 30th, so we are already looking forward to the arrival of Namaqua's next litter.

Pregnancies in January 2022

Females pregnant in January	21
Females who aborted	0
Females who gave birth, litters lost	1
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	3
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	10
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	7

Weather at the KMP



The average maximum temperature was 34.9 °C and the average minimum temperature was 18.4 °C. On the 3rd temperatures rose to the highest recorded temperature this month of 39.4 °C. The coldest morning was on the 2nd, with temperatures dropping to 10.2 °C. We had a lot of rain in January, namely 128mm, half of which fell in one day, on the 31st.

January 2022 Life History Details

Elrond's Council:

- 19 out of 22 meerkats were present at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate males Smaug (VECM013), Arwen (VECM014) and Boromir (VECM016) went roving and were still absent from the group on the 31st.
- Adult subordinate male Langa (VZUM033) left the group on the 28th and returned the same day.
- The 4 pups born to dominant female Galadriel (VECF032) had their first move and first forage on the 4th.
- Elrond's Council had an encounter with an unknown meerkat on the 4th.
- The group had no inter-group interactions or group splits this month.
- Habituation is still considered *Incomplete*. Galadriel is being weighed on a regular basis and can be followed at 1-2m on a good day while she is foraging. The rest of the individuals are fully habituated.
- All individuals appear to be in good health.



Elrond's Council 2:

- 6 out of 7 meerkats were present at the group at the end of the month.
- Adult female Orc (VECF012) left the group and was still absent at the end of January.
- Dominant female Pippin (VECF003) and yearling females Tolkien (VECF019) and Kilie (VECF036) are pregnant. With the sub-group breeding and having been together for almost 2 months, they will soon be considered a new group and receive a new name.
- Elrond's Council 2 had encounters with an unknown individual on the 4th and 24th. They also encountered yearling subordinate males Priscilla (VMPM046) and Mr Scruff (VMPM052) from Make-e-Plan on the 10th.
- The group had an encounter with Zulus on the 14th and retreated after being chased by their opponents.
- No group splits were observed in January.
- Habituation at the group is *Incomplete*. Pippin is being weighed on a regular basis and is comfortable with being followed at 1-2m, although she will regularly look up to make sure she knows where the observer is. The rest of the individuals are fully habituated.
- All individuals appear healthy.

Gold Diggers:

- There were 17 out of 21 meerkats present at Gold Diggers at the end of the month.
- Yearling subordinate females Cosmic Owl (VGDF019), Shiva (VGDF021) and Corrugation (VGDF023) and sub-adult male Baymax (VGDM0278) were all absent at the end of January.
- Yearling subordinate female Shelby (VGDF022) left the group on the 14th and returned the next day. Adult subordinate male Jack (VGDM010) left the group twice and returned again. Adult subordinate male James Sawyer (VGDM011) returned on the 6th and then left and returned 2 more times. He was back with the group at the end of the month. Yearling subordinate males Beatrice (VGDM014) and Rogelio de la Vega (VGDM015) both left and returned once.
- Dominant female Cleo (VGDF013) left in December, did not return to the group and was given her Last Seen.
- Her absence means that there is currently no dominant female at the group. Observers are witnessing a lot of dominance competitions between adult female littermates Fleabag (VGDF005), Goldeneye (VGDF007) and Juliet (VGDF009).
- The group had an encounter with an unknown meerkat on the 20th.
- Gold Diggers had no inter-group interactions or group splits this month.
- Gold Diggers' habituation level is in *Advanced Progress* as almost all group members are marked, most individuals are weighable and quite comfortable with follows. Our main focus presently lies on Jack and Shelby. We are currently trialling the collection of adlib data at the group.

- All individuals seem to be healthy.

Hakuna Matata:

- 15 out of 16 individuals were present at the end of the month. The group returned to our reserve on the 9th and was seen with 4 foraging pups and a dominant female (Sencha, VHMF030) that was pregnant again. Hakuna Matata spent most of January on our reserve, so we have been able to collect Life History and adlib data again.
- Adult subordinate female Azizi (VHMF039) was absent at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate females Shenzi (VHMF038) and Zahra (VHMF040) were given their Last Seen after being away from the group for over a month.
- Adult subordinate male Luther (VLM245) returned at the beginning of January and left and returned one more time since.
- No individual encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were observed in January.
- All individuals appear to be healthy.

Jaxx:

- The group size increased to 25 when 5 new pups emerged on the 11th. There were 22 out of 25 individuals present at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate female Salamander (VJXF135) and yearling subordinate females Enya (VJXF141) and Tuna Fish (VJXF145) briefly returned and left again. They were all absent at the end of the month. Adult subordinate male Nibs (VJXM137) immigrated back into the Jaxx after being away for 2 months.
- Adult subordinate female Elea (VJXF129), yearling subordinate females Amanda Leigh Rose James (VJXF143) and Footprints (VJXF148) and sub-adult female Lord Kinbote (VJXM151) were given their Last Seen after being absent for a month.
- Jaxx had an encounter with an unknown individual on the 25th.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were observed this month.
- All individuals at Jaxx seem to be in good health.

Lazuli:

- 13 out of 14 individuals were present at the end of the month. The group is expected to increase in size soon with dominant female Sigma (VLF230) being pregnant again.
- Adult subordinate male Slop (VLM253) left 5 times and returned 4 times, remaining absent at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate females Haopia (VLF244) and Lennon (VLF246), who had already been moved into the group Unknown, have now being given their Last Seen.
- Lazuli had an encounter with 2 unknown individuals on the 3rd. During his roving forays, Slop once appeared at the group without re-joining it.
- No inter-group interactions were observed this month.
- Lazuli had 1 daily group split on the 22nd.



- All individuals seem to be in good health.

Make-e-Plan:

- There were 11 out of 13 individuals present at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Bridget (VQLF011) gave birth on the 10th. So far, we have only seen one pup, but have heard more inside the burrow.
- Yearling subordinate males Priscilla (VMPPM046) and Thimbletack (VMPPM053) were absent at the end of January.
- Adult subordinate males Thorn (VMPPM027), Maverick (VMPPM034), Kanyonyi (VMPPM036) and Doby (VMPPM037) have been given their Last Seen after having had no sightings for 2 months. Yearling subordinate females Dusty (VMPPF047) and Fleegle (VMPPF051) have been given their Last Seen after being absent for a month.
- Yearling subordinate female Millewa (VMPPF048) was moved into the group Unknown. She has been absent from Make-e-Plan for a month but was seen on the 15th with an unmarked male and 2 former Namaqua group members, namely adult male Zuko (VNQM012) and yearling male Cooper (VNQM019).
- Yearling subordinate male Mr Scruff (VMPPM052) returned on the 2nd and left and returned 2 more times. Yearling female Bonxie (VMPPF054) left and returned, was then evicted, and accepted back a few days later.
- Priscilla and Mr Scruff were seen roving at Elrond's Council 2 on the 10th.
- Make-e-Plan had an encounter with an unknown individual on the 5th. They encountered Cooper on the 15th and an unmarked, very well habituated male on the 17th.
- On the 15th they had an inter-group interaction with Millewa, Zuko, Cooper and an unmarked male. Make-e-Plan war danced and chased them away.
- No group splits were observed this month.
- Make-e-Plan became a habituation group after the arrival of adult males Sketchy Bongo (VTSM019) and Sushi (VTSM006) from Trackie-Daks at the end of November. Sketchy Bongo is a very skittish individual and we are working hard on his habituation. We hope being around a well-habituated group will have a positive impact on how comfortable he is around us.
- All individuals appear to be in good health.

Make-e-Plan 4:

- All 4 members were present at the end of the month.
- Female dominance is still unsettled.
- Adult females Arabella (VMPPF035) and Vivienne (VMPPF038) both gave birth. We do not yet know how many pups they had. As the sub-group seems to be breeding successfully and has been together for almost 2 months, they will soon be considered a new group and receive a new name.
- 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 decreased to 12.
- Yearling subordinate female Hiccup (VNQF016) was found dead on the 21st after showing tuberculosis symptoms for 3 months. The last few times she was seen, she was looking emaciated and struggled to keep up with the rest of the group.
- Adult subordinate female Mononoke Hime (VNQF014) gave birth on the 26th. She only lactated for a day and the group never left babysitters. Therefore, the litter is considered lost before emergence. The dominant female Manzai (VNQF013) is currently pregnant.
- Namaqua had an encounter with an unknown male on the 11th.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were observed in January.
- No other Namaqua meerkats are showing signs of TB and seem to be healthy.

Phoenix

- 12 unmarked individuals were present at the end of the month. The only identifiable individual, the radio-collared yearling female Pinky (VPHF001), has not been accepted back into the group. An unknown female at Phoenix gave birth and the group has been staying at the same burrow since. Therefore, we have been able to keep track of them without a radio-collared individual present.
- 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:

- All 11 individuals were present at the end of the month.
- 3 new pups have emerged on the 9th, and they started foraging with the group on the 13th.
- Adult subordinate male Grigio (VJXM126) was moved to the group Unknown.
- No individual encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were seen this month.
- All individuals seem to be in good health.

Side Quest:

- All 11 group members were present at the end of January.
- There were no individual encounters, inter-group interactions, or group splits observed during the month.
- All individuals appear to be healthy.

Trackie-Daks:

- All 10 individuals were present at Trackie-Daks at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Bel-Hurricane (VWVF231) and yearling subordinate females Fly (VWVF237) and



Hachi (VWF238) gave birth on the 26th or 27th. We do not yet know how many pups they had.

- Before giving birth at the group, Fly and Hachi had both left and returned once.
- Yearling subordinate female Fergalicious (VTSF020) and sub-adult female Tara (VTDF001) have been given their Last Seen after being absent from the group for a month.
- There were no individual encounters, inter-group interactions, or group splits observed this month.
- The habituation level is currently *In Progress*. Focus is on the dominant male Coquette (VTSM014) who still needs a lot of habituation work. Adult subordinate Jiminy Cricket (VTSM007) still needs habituation work too. We hope that the arrivals of new pups, who are generally easier to habituate, will positively influence the habituation levels of the males that need the most work.
- All individuals appear to be healthy.

Ubuntu:

- All 13 individuals were present at the end of the month and one yet unmarked pup was seen.
- Yearling subordinate males Thulani (VUBM036), Scarboi Jnr (VUBM038), and sub-adult males Errie (VUBM041) and Chad (VUBM042) were moved to the group Unknown.
- Former dominant male Mr Worldwide (VUBM031) and yearling subordinate males Stanislas (VUBM029), Rowdy (VUBM032) and Stitch (VUBM033) were given their Last Seen after being absent since November.
- Dominant female Daisy (VBBF111), adult subordinate females Magali (VUBF023) and Mameuf (VUBF026) and yearling subordinate female Cthulhu (VUBF035) gave birth in January. So far, 3 pups of Daisy's litter have emerged. We can be sure they are hers because she gave birth 9 days before the next female.
- Before giving birth, Magali was evicted and accepted back on the 8th and then left and returned once more.
- Ubuntu had an encounter with an unknown meerkat on the 10th and another with adult subordinate male Luther (VLM245) from Hakuna Matata later that day.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were observed during the month.
- Habituation is still considered to be *Incomplete*. The habituation of Captain Barbosa is continuing. He is still not entirely comfortable with observers following him at a close distance, but he is consistently weighable.
- All individuals appear to be in good health, except for Captain Barbosa. Observers have witnessed one serious fight between him and the dominant male Jumper (VTSM017). After that, he was attacked by Jumper multiple times. He seems to have lost part of his bottom jaw and his bottom teeth in that fight. By the end of the month, these injuries seemed to be healing and he is still capable of foraging and eating.

Whiskers:

- There were 14 out of 15 individuals present at the end of the month.

- Adult subordinate female Luna (VWF235) left and returned once and was evicted twice and accepted back once, remaining absent at the end of the month.
- Subordinate yearling female Laika (VWF236) left and returned twice and was evicted and accepted back twice more during the month. Sub-adult female Crunchie (VWF250) left and returned once.
- Both Luna and Laika gave birth at the end of the month, but Luna has been evicted since. It remains to be seen whether their litters will survive.
- No encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were observed this month.
- All individuals at Whiskers seem to be healthy.

Zulus:

- The group number increased to 13 with the emergence of 2 pups born to dominant female Spruddel (VZUF028) on the 11th. They first emerged on the 31st.
- Yearling subordinate females Salazar (VZUF051) and Rowena (VZUF054) returned to the group. Yearling subordinate female Helga (VZUF052) left on the 25th and returned later that day.
- Zulus had an encounter with 2 unknown individuals on the 26th.
- They had an inter-group interaction with Elrond's Council 2 on the 14th.
- No group splits were observed during the month.
- All individuals at Zulus appear to be healthy.

The following authors contributed to this report:

Bieke Maex, Life History Coordinator
Lila Chillingworth, Life History Coordinator Trainee