



The Meerkatter

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

<i>Ubuntu is expanding.....</i>	1-2	<i>Pregnancies in June.....</i>	3
<i>Brussels Sprouts.....</i>	2-3	<i>Weather at the KMP.....</i>	3
		<i>Life History Details.....</i>	3-6

Ubuntu is expanding

The last time we wrote about Ubuntu in detail at the end of January, two pups had just emerged. As the dominant female Daisy (VBBF111) and adult subordinate females Magali (VUBF023), Mameuf (VUBF026) and Cthulhu (VUBF035) all gave birth over the course of nineteen days, we knew there were probably still more pups in the sleeping burrow. We were anxiously waiting to see how many more would emerge. Ubuntu surpassed everyone's expectations when the group broke last summer's pup record. No less than thirteen pups had emerged by the 8th of February.



The first pups to emerge at Ubuntu. Photo credit: Zurich Manager Bieke Maex.

Eleven of the pups first moved burrows on the evening of the 7th. As we had a rainstorm that evening, we believe Ubuntu had to go below unexpectedly and the aftermath became clear the next morning. While an observer was waiting for the group to wake up, she saw Magali and Cthulhu sneak off in the direction of the previous sleeping burrow. About an hour later they came back carrying two pups, who had apparently been left behind in the birth burrow. The females brought back female Behati (VUBF049) and male Beans (VUBM053). Based on the dates they emerged, we think Behati is a pup from Mameuf's litter and Beans was born to either Magali or Cthulhu. It was very surprising to see that the meerkats had noticed two out of the thirteen pups were missing and to see them go back to search for

them. This raises a lot of questions about how pups are identified and makes us wonder whether meerkats can individually identify each pup or keep count of their total number.

Their pups had barely emerged, and the adults already had their work cut out for them. The total group number increased from eleven to twenty-four, which meant there were now more pups than adults, making pup feeding a particularly challenging job. The five oldest pups, born to Daisy and Mameuf, are all still alive. They all started foraging on the 4th of February, almost two weeks before the eight smaller pups started on the 17th. It was clear that those five were much bigger, stronger, and more confident and were often observed stealing pup feeds from their younger siblings or even attacking them. Out of the eight smaller pups, five survived to this day. VUBP057 disappeared on the 31st of March, VUBM054 was last seen with the group on the 2nd of April and VUBP056 on the 17th. All three were given their Last Seen ten days after they disappeared.



Six of the youngest Ubuntu pups when they first emerged. Photo credit: Zurich Manager Bieke Maex.

The chaos brought on by the pups' presence, was not the last dramatic thing to happen at Ubuntu. On the 14th of April the dominant male Jumper (VTSM017), who immigrated into the group from Trackie-Dacks at the end of December, was run over by a car on the main road. This marked the start of another short period of unsettled male dominance at the group. Adult subordinate male Captain Barbosa (VLM265) then seized this opportunity and started



behaving as the new dominant at Ubuntu. He was showing dominance behaviours and was anal marking everyone and everything. There were no other mature males left at the group to submit to him, and we made him the new official dominant male on the 22nd.

His reign, however, was very short lived. On the 5th of May, two subordinate yearling males from Hakuna Matata started roving at the group. Ogg (VHMM047) and Greebo (VHMM048) were seen trying to join the group for about a week. Initially, Captain Barbosa would lead the charge by war dancing at them and chasing them away. He was not able to stand his ground and the two males eventually officially immigrated into the group on the 11th of May. They competed for dominance for several weeks, until we observed submissions from both Captain Barbosa and Greebo to Ogg and the latter was made the official dominant on the 20th of June.

Ever since the dominant male Scar (VUBM021) went missing in April last year, no male dominant at Ubuntu has lasted for more than 5 months. We are curious to see whether Ogg will finally bring a period of stability at the group.

Author: Zurich Manager Bieke Maex

Brussels Sprouts – Back together, but not as expected

At the beginning of May, Brussels Sprouts were spending their time at sleeping burrows along the riverbank northeast of Whiskers Crossing. Seven hundred meters southwest of their location, Gold Diggers were also using a sleeping burrow on the riverbank. Brussels Sprouts currently presented the perfect opportunity for a roving male: two mature females to mate with, an open position as dominant male and only one juvenile male for meagre competition. So, when two observers bumped into the group on the 9th of May, it came as no real surprise that adult subordinate males Jack (VGDM010) and James (VGDM011) had left Gold Diggers and were roving at Brussels Sprouts. The observers were excited to find James and dominant female Arabella (VMPF035) mating. This is a behaviour we rarely get to see, so it was very interesting to witness it. We were curious to see if this mating would lead to a pregnancy, but at the time of writing Arabella is not showing any signs of pregnancy.

Jack and James went below with the group that evening and were clearly behaving as part of Brussels Sprouts. They seem to have settled in well since and appear to be permanent additions. To our delight, being in a small well habituated group has had a really positive impact on Jack, who is an individual who still requires additional habituation work. At the time of writing, we still do not know which of the two immigrants will take the position of dominant male. Both males are very relaxed in each other's presence, so we have seen hardly any

dominance competition behaviours and neither has submitted to the other.



Brussels Sprouts alarming at a Martial Eagle from a bolt hole. Photo credit: Life History Coordinator Lila Chillingworth.

We did wonder how their addition would affect any future meetings between Brussels Sprouts and Brussels Sprouts 2. Around the time Jack and James joined Brussels Sprouts, Brussels Sprouts 2 had finally started to move west and were about 900 meters from Brussels Sprouts' location. However, it would not be until three months after their initial split that the groups would finally meet again.

On the morning of the 8th of June Brussels Sprouts 2 tentatively approached Brussels Sprouts. Brussels Sprouts responded by war dancing at Brussels Sprouts 2, who retreated. After this retreat juvenile female Lyra (VBSF002) tried to approach the group on her own but was chased off by adult subordinate female Vivienne (VMPF038). Brussels Sprouts then chased Brussels Sprouts 2 all the way back to one of Brussels Sprouts 2's previous sleeping burrows and beyond. However, being chased off did not deter Lyra as she continued to have encounters with Brussels Sprouts in the afternoon despite being chased off with each one. Her persistence paid off, as on the afternoon of the 10th an observer arrived at the group to find Lyra had managed to re-join her original group Brussels Sprouts. To their surprise they found adult subordinate male Gurke (VHMM036) had joined as well. Gurke had left Brussels Sprouts 2 recently to go roving and the original Brussels Sprouts group may have presented as a more appealing group to re-join, being larger in size and not consisting of mostly juveniles. His return



to the group did not pose a threat to Jack and James as he was seen submitting to both soon after his return.

Brussels Sprouts stayed like this until the 17th when an observer found juvenile female Totoro (VBSF001) waking up with the group and acting as part of it. As the group had not been visited in two days, we do not know the circumstances of Totoro's return from Brussels Sprouts 2 to her original group, but we are very happy to have her back.

With Totoro's emigration out of Brussels Sprouts 2 the group could no longer be considered a subgroup as the remaining meerkats, dominant male Shandy (VHMM023) and juvenile male Love (VBSM003), are now considered just roving males. Brussels Sprouts 2 was disintegrated on the 17th. Shandy and Love were visited on the 23rd and both appeared to be in good health. They were found hanging around Water Pump House on the eastern edge of the reserve, encroaching onto Namaqua territory. Therefore, it was no surprise to observers that they had an encounter with Namaqua on the 27th. We are unsure whether Shandy and Love, will try to join another group, will try to re-join Brussels Sprouts or will stay lone roving males for a while. As always will shall keep you up to date with what they end up doing.

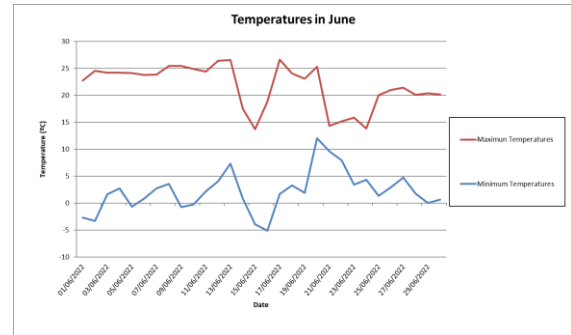
After a few tumultuous months, Brussels Sprouts is back up to nine meerkats strong. Even with their new members, they still make a lovely group to visit. Hopefully they continue to welcome new additions to their group and carry on growing in the coming months.

Author: Life History Coordinator Lila Chillingworth

Pregnancies in June 2022

Females pregnant in June	0
Females who aborted	0
Females who gave birth, litters lost	0
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	1
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	0
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	0

Weather at the KMP



The average maximum temperature was 21.7 °C and the average minimum temperature was 2.2 °C. On the 17th temperatures rose to their highest of 26.6 °C. The coldest morning was on the 16th, with temperatures dropping to -5.9 °C. We had very little rain in June except between the 19th and 24th. On the 21st and 22nd it rained the heaviest with 68 mm and 48.8 mm respectively.

April 2022 Life History Details

Alba:

- 10 out of 12 members were present at the end of June. Yearling subordinate females Kilie (VECF035) and Moos (VECF036) were both absent at the end of the month after being evicted on the 25th.
- The dominant female Pippin (VECF003) is officially pregnant.
- On the morning of the 4th yearling subordinate females Tolkien (VECF019) and Moos and yearling subordinate male Godric (VZUM053) stayed behind at the sleeping burrow but re-joined the group later that morning. On the 18th yearling subordinate females Kilie and Moos were not found with the group but returned separately later that session.
- On the 9th Alba had an encounter with adult subordinate male Priscilla (VMPP046) and yearling subordinate male Mr Scruff (VMPP052) from Make-e-Plan.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were observed.
- All individuals appear healthy.

Brussels Sprouts:

- All 9 members were present at the end of the month.
- On the 10th juvenile female Lyra (VBSF002) and adult subordinate male Gurke (VHMM036) immigrated back into the group and on the 17th juvenile female Totoro (VBSF001) did as well.
- Male dominance at the group remains unsettled. Upon his return, Gurke submitted to both adult males Jack (VGDM010) and James (VGDM011), but we have not seen either submit to the other.
- On the 8th Jack left the group, which may have been due to the presence of two observers at the group. He was found again with the group in the afternoon session.



- The group had one inter-group interaction with Brussels Sprouts 2 on the 8th.
- Later that day, Brussels Sprouts had 2 more encounters with former group member Lyra, who was accepted back into the group a few days later.
- No group splits were seen this month.
- Habituation at Brussels Sprouts is considered *Advanced Progress* as habituation work is being done on Jack. At the end of this month, he was quite confident at the scale however is still a bit nervous around hands. Whilst foraging observers can approach him to about 1 meter. However, he is uncomfortable with 2 observers present and clearly stays at a distance or even runs away.
- All individuals at Brussels Sprouts seem to be in good health.

Brussels Sprouts 2:

- Due the emigration of the last female out of the group, Brussels Sprouts 2 was disintegrated on the 17th. At the end of the month this subgroup no longer exists.
- On the 5th adult subordinate male Gurke (VHMM036) did not wake with the group. He was found foraging with them again on the 8th. On the 10th we discovered he had immigrated back into Brussels Sprouts.
- On the 8th juvenile female Lyra (VBSF002) left the group, after their inter-group interaction and had 2 more encounters with Brussels Sprouts. She immigrated back into her original group on the 10th.
- Juvenile female Totoro (VBSF001) was found acting as part of Brussels Sprouts on the 17th.
- The dominant male Shandy (VHMM023) left the group and was seen encountering Namaqua on the 12th. The next day he was back with the group again.
- With the emigration of all other group members, Shandy and juvenile male Love (VBSM003) are now considered rovers.
- They had inter-group interaction with Brussels Sprouts on the 8th.
- No group splits happened during the time the subgroup existed.
- All individuals at Brussels Sprouts 2 seem to be in good health.

Elrond's Council:

- All 16 members were present at the end of the month.
- On the 27th adult subordinate male Untitled (VECM025) did not wake up with the group but joined them again later that morning.
- Female dominance is still unsettled. Regular dominance competition behaviours are observed between the only remaining females at the group, namely sub-adult subordinate females Mojo Jojo (VECF038) and Snoop Kat (VECF039).
- The group had an encounter with adult subordinate male Priscilla (VMPM046) from Make-e-Plan on the 30th.

- No inter-group interactions or group splits were seen this month.
- All individuals at Elrond's Council seem to be in good health

Gold Diggers:

- 15 out of 19 members were present at the end of the month.
- Yearling subordinate males Beatrice (VGDM014), Rogelio de la Vega (VGDM015), Baymax (VGDM028) and Jojo (VGDM032) left the group on the 30th and did not return in June.
- Adult subordinate female Juliet (VGDF009) left on the 25th and woke up with the group the next day.
- Beatrice, Baymax and Jojo had encounters with Zulus on the 30th.
- Female dominance was finally settled on the 30th and adult female Goldeneye (VGDF007) is the new dominant female.
- Gold Diggers had encounters with adult subordinate male Mion (VZUM057) from Zulus on the 17th, 18th, 26th and 30th. On the 26th and the 30th he was joined by his littermate Zuma (VZUM059). The group had several more encounters with their littermate Bear (VZUM059) on the 30th. On the 25th Gold Diggers had 3 encounters with 2 unknown meerkats.
- They had 3 inter-group encounters in June. One with Lazuli on the 8th, one on the 30th with an unknown group and one with Zulus on the same day.
- No group splits were observed this month.
- Habituation at Gold Diggers is considered *Advanced Progress* as habituation work is being done on adult subordinate female Fleabag (VGDF005) and yearling subordinate female Shelby (VGDF022). At the end of this month Fleabag's progress has regressed a bit as she can only be followed at two to three meters and is quite skittish. She is not interested in egg or water rewards. Shelby's progress has not really changed as she could be followed at two meters.
- All individuals seem to be healthy.

Hakuna Matata:

- Hakuna Matata were only seen 3 times this month and have spent the rest of their time on the Heights farm. We are therefore not entirely sure how many members are still with the group. When the group was last sighted on the 26th, 14 meerkats were present.
- Yearling subordinate male Seymour (VHMM050) left around mid-June and was seen by himself near Whiskers on the 17th. He was back with the group by the 22nd. His littermate Reef (VHMM054) left Hakuna Matata around the same time and was seen roving at Whiskers on the 18th. He had also returned to the group by the 22nd.
- Hakuna Matata had an inter-group interaction with Whiskers on the 13th.
- No individual encounters or group splits were seen this month.
- All individuals appear healthy.



Jaxx:

- All 29 meerkats were present at Jaxx at the end of June.
- The dominant female Baloo (VJXF080) gave birth on the 6th to 6 pups. By the end of June 2 of them (VJXP1717 and VJXP172) had properly emerged.
- Adult subordinate males Rincewind (VJXM131), Nibs (VJXM137), Tootles (VJXM139) left and returned twice in June. Adult subordinate male The Dude (VJXM142) and yearling subordinate males Oliver (VJXM144), Fred (VJXM146) and Cigarette Smoking Man (VJXM153) left and returned once. Sub-adult subordinate female Queen Jane (VJXF158), sub-adult subordinate male Hank the Tank (VJXM164) and juvenile female Old Greg (VJXF167) also left and returned once. Yearling subordinate females Scully (VJXF149) and Gray (VJXF150) were accepted back on the 5th after previously being evicted at the end of May.
- Jaxx had 3 encounters with an unknown individual and one with 2 unknown individuals on the 25th.
- The had a daily group split on the 13th.
- No inter-group interactions were observed this month.
- On their way back from Runaways observers came across a group of 7 meerkats, consisting of former Jaxx females Tuna Fish (VJXF145) and Lord Kinbote (VJXF151), an unknown adult female and 4 juveniles.
- All individuals at Jaxx seem to be in good health.

Lazuli:

- All 16 individuals were present at the end of June.
- Yearling subordinate male Karma (VLM277) and sub-adult subordinate female Kracken (VLF285) were given their Last Seen after being absent from the group for a month. Former female group member Haopia (VLF244) was again given a Last Seen, after not being seen for a month since being sighted by herself on the 16th of May.
- Adult subordinate male Moteck (VLM261) left on the 8th and returned during the morning session of the 9th.
- The group had an inter-group interaction with Gold Diggers on the 8th.
- No individual encounters or group splits were observed in June.
- All individuals seem to be in good health.

Make-e-Plan:

- 23 out of 24 individuals were present at the end of June.
- Adult subordinate male Priscilla (VMPP046) was roving at Elrond's Council at the end of the month after already having left and returned 3 times earlier in June. Yearling subordinate male Mr Scruff (VMPP052) left and returned twice.
- Pups James (VMPP072), Romance (VMPP075), Fleetwood (VMPP076), Bob Morane (VMPP077), Freddie (VMPP078), Sunshine (VMPP079), Lizzy (VMPP080) and

Ziggy (VMPP081) were all given their Last Seen this month.

- Priscilla had encounters with Namaqua on the 6th and 10th, one with Alba on the 9th and 2 with Elrond's Council on the 30th. Mr Scruff joined him at Alba on the 9th and Namaqua on the 10th.
- No individual encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were observed in June.
- Habituation work continues on adult male Sketchy Bongo (VTSM019). At the sleeping burrow he is weary of being approached and will watch closely and bark when the observer is ten meters away. However, he will allow the observer to approach to between two to five meters. He is not good with quick movements.

Namaqua:

- All 11 members were present at the end of June.
- Adult subordinate female Mononoke Hime (VNQF014) was given her Last Seen.
- Yearling subordinate male Fredi (VNQM028) left on the 6th and was found with the group again on the 9th.
- Namaqua encountered adult subordinate male Priscilla (VMPP046) and yearling subordinate male Mr Scruff (VMPP052) on the 10th. They encountered adult male Shandy (VHMM023), from Brussels Sprouts 2 on the 12th and 27th. On the 27th he was joined by Love (VBSM003).
- No individual encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were seen in June.
- We suspect yearling subordinate male Hanspeter (VNQM029) is showing signs of tuberculosis. At the end of June, he was very skinny with protruding hipbones and ribs and had a puncture wound on his nose.

Phoenix

- 16 unmarked individuals were present at the end of the month, including 4 juveniles.
- No encounters or interactions were witnessed this month.
- The group's habituation status is still *In Progress*. We can approach the group to within 5 meters. There is still only one juvenile meerkat that eats egg at Phoenix.
- We do not have a radio collared individual at the group and are still focussing on cage habituation.
- All individuals at Phoenix appear to be healthy.

Runaways:

- All 16 members were present at the end of the month.
- They had 2 encounters with an unknown individual on the 30th.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were seen this month.
- All individuals seem to be in good health.

Side Quest:

- 11 out of 13 members were present at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate female Timon (VZUF049) left on the 12th, returned the next day and was



evicted that same morning, remaining absent at the end of the month. Yearling subordinate female Chewie (VSIF004) disappeared on the 25th.

- There were no individual encounters, inter-group interactions, or group splits observed during the month.
- All individuals appear to be healthy.

Trackie-Daks:

- 17 out of 18 individuals were present at the end of June.
- The dominant female Bel-Hurricane (VWF231) has been absent since the 18th. Female dominance is therefore currently unsettled.
- Yearling subordinate male Marvin Gaye (VTSM021) was given his Last Seen.
- There were no individual encounters, inter-group interactions, or group splits observed this month.
- The habituation level is currently *In Progress*. Our habituation efforts are focussed on the dominant male Coquette (VTSM014), adult subordinate male Jiminy Cricket (VTSM007) and juvenile female Sassy Pants (VTDF016). Coquette has made incredible progress over the last few months, will drink water most days and is usually fine with being approached at 0.5 to 2 meters. Jiminy Cricket has good and bad days. On some days he drinks water and is easy to weigh, on other days he cannot be approached closer than 3 meters. Sassy Pants has recently become a lot more relaxed around us and has been jumping in the scale since the last week of June. All other individuals can be weighed consistently. We are trying to follow the group after they leave in the mornings. Mainly Coquette is not comfortable with this and runs away from observers. The other individuals seem to be fine with our presence.
- All individuals appear to be healthy.

Ubuntu:

- All 22 individuals were present at the end of the month.
- On the 24th adult subordinate female Magali (VUBF023), Mameuf (VUBF026) and Cthulhu (VUBF035) and yearling subordinate female Welma (VUBF043) were not with the group at the start of the afternoon session. Throughout the afternoon they joined Ubuntu again and were all accepted back.
- Adult male Ogg (VHMM047) is the new dominant male at Ubuntu.
- No encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were observed this month.
- Habituation is still considered to be *Incomplete*. The habituation of Captain Barbosa continues. He can be followed between one to two meters, occasionally watching the observer closely but mostly happy to forage. However, he is easily startled when observers step on crunchy grass, which makes recording him particularly challenging. At the scale he is keen but sometime lacks the confidence to approach the scale and hop in.
- Adult subordinate males Greebo (VHMM048) and Captain Barbosa (VLM265) both suffered

injuries while fighting Ogg in the battle for male dominance at Ubuntu.

Whiskers:

- All 19 individuals were present at the end of the month.
- Yearling subordinate male KitKat (VWM249) left on the 4th and returned on the 6th.
- Whiskers had an encounter with an unknown meerkat on the 18th.
- They had an inter-group interaction with Hakuna Matata on the 13th.
- They had an overnight group split on the 13th, a daily group split on the 16th and a group split of uncertain duration on the 28th.
- All individuals at Whiskers seem to be healthy.

Zulus:

- 10 out of 14 individuals were present at the end of the month.
- Yearling subordinate males Bear (VZUM056), Mion (VZUM057) and Zuma (VZUM059) and pup Spirit (VZUP068) were absent at the end of June.
- The yearling males have been coming and going all month. Previously, Bear had left and returned 4 times. Mion had already left and returned 6 times and Zuma 7 times.
- Bear was seen roving at Gold Diggers on the 30th. Mion had encounters with Gold Diggers on the 17th, 18th, 26th and 30th. Zuma had encounters with Alba on the 4th and Gold Diggers on the 26th and 30th.
- Zulus had encounters with VGDM014, VGDM028 and VGDM032 from Gold Diggers on the 30th.
- They had an inter-group interaction with Gold Diggers on the 30th.
- No group splits were observed in June.
- All individuals at Zulus appear to be healthy.

The following authors contributed to this report:

Lila Chillingworth, Life History Coordinator
Bieke Maex, Zurich Manager