



The Meerkatter

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

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Elrond's Ending?

The disappearance and likely death of the dominant female Calypso (VECF027) at the start of April 2022 marked the start of a period of instability at Elrond's Council. At the end of March, she aborted at least three pups. After that her health quickly declined; she became very skinny, was lethargic and seemed to have a uterine prolapse. We last saw her on the 2nd of April and presume she died shortly after.



The former dominant female Calypso (VECF027) taking care of the youngest litter at Elrond's Council. Photo credit: Zurich Manager Bieke Maex.

As all the other yearling and adult females had left Elrond's Council in November 2021 and consequently established the new group Alba, there were no real candidates left to take over from Calypso. Mojo Jojo (VECF038) and Snoop Kat (VECF039) were the only two females left in a group of seventeen meerkats, but they were only nine months old at the time. Nevertheless, we started observing dominance competition behaviours between the littermates from mid-April onwards. Four months down the line, the competition is still ongoing,

and we are slowly starting to wonder how much longer Elrond's Council will remain a group.

The oldest males at the group, including the dominant male Palestrina (VLM211) have been coming and going since the start of June, culminating in a very chaotic day on the 7th of July. On that day an observer tracked the group to do sound recordings. When he had a clear beep, he waited for the group to wake up from the sleeping burrow, but only six meerkats emerged. One of them was Palestrina, who has the radio collar at Elrond's Council. He was joined by adult subordinate males Pavlova (VECM022), Pucky (VECM023) and Charlie (VECM031) and yearling subordinate males Ozzie (VECM033), Milo (VECM034) and Kuzco (VECM040). The six meerkats had apparently left Elrond's Council to go roving and immediately made a beeline for Alba's favourite sleeping burrow right next to Ooh Dam. As soon as they got there, they had an encounter with Alba. Their dominant female Pippin (VECF003) took the lead in chasing the six males off.

As someone else was doing adlib at Alba and could keep track of the excitement, the sound recorder left to go look for the rest of Elrond's Council. On his way, he bumped into Alba again, before he finally found the younger second half of Elrond's Council. A few minutes later Alba charged at them, and they quickly retreated. Unexpectedly, the six roving males then turned up behind Alba and came to their group members' support. Chaos ensued with meerkats from both groups running around and chasing each other away, with Elrond's Council then running after some of their own group members for almost a kilometer, only to turn around and chase Alba away again.

After the inter-group interaction, the males rejoined their original group and Elrond's Council stayed together for eleven days, until Palestrina left again from the 18th until the 21st. On the 29th Palestrina, Pavlova, adult subordinate male Untitled (VECM025) and Milo left the group again for a few hours and had another encounter with Alba. Alba again war danced at the intruders and chased them away.

As Palestrina is the individual with the radio collar, it has become quite challenging to find the other part of



the group and keep track of potential female dominance changes. Although we do not have DNA evidence to support this yet, Mojo Jojo and Snoop Kat were born while Palestrina was already the dominant male at the group and are quite likely his offspring. We believe Palestrina might be looking for another group where he can challenge the current dominant male or at least to try his luck as a roving male. Only time will tell what the future has in store for Elrond's Council.



Elrond's Council in January, before the group became unstable. Photo credit: Zurich Manager Bieke Maex.

Unexpected Meerkat Sightings

According to our current protocol, we give meerkats their Last Seen when they have not been sighted for a certain amount of time. The grace period for pups is ten days, for females and males – outside of the breeding season – a month and two months for males during the breeding season. When a pup disappears, it is likely to have died or have been predated and we rarely see it reappear, but it is not impossible to come across mature meerkats long after they were given a Last Seen. Here is an overview of our unexpected meerkat sightings so far in 2022:

On the 25th of February, observers had just removed radio collars from the roving former Namaqua males; adult subordinate Zuko (VNQM012) and yearling subordinates Barney (VNQM018) and Cooper (VNQM019) on our neighbouring farm, Leeupan, and were on their way back to the farmhouse. They came across a group of eight to ten meerkats, including former adult subordinate Make-e-Plan males Thorn (VMPPM027), Maverick (VMPPM034) and Doby (VMPPM037). The three males were comfortable with having people around, but the other individuals, including an unknown number of pups, were hiding in bolt holes and barking. It was lovely to see that the males had established a new group after leaving Make-e-Plan at the end of October last year.

Adult subordinate female Haopia (VLF244) was evicted from Lazuli on the 25th of October 2021. She and her littermate Lennon (VLF246) tried to rejoin the group multiple times until mid-December. She was spotted once more by herself at the start of January this year and again on the 16th of May, trying to

approach her original group. She has not been seen since, but if she managed to survive for that long, it is possible for her to still be around today.

Adult subordinate male Slop (VLM253) used to leave Lazuli regularly to go roving but has not been with his original group since the 25th of January. He was not seen at all for several months, until an observer stumbled upon him and adult subordinate female Orc (VECF012), who left Alba on the 7th of January. She tried to approach the group a few more times in the weeks after that but had not been seen near Alba since the 12th of February. Someone saw her once more by herself on the 3rd of March while looking for Brussels Sprouts. On the 6th of June an observer found the pair together while tracking Zulus in an area we call the *Bermuda Triangle*. This is the area between Sandy Crossing, Ooh Dam and the northern perimeter and was given its nickname because meerkats are notoriously difficult to track here. Another observer came over with a transponder reader and the meerkats were identified. They have not been seen since and have been given a new Last Seen. However, it would not be a surprise if we saw them again in the future.

On the 27th of June two observers were walking back from Runaways when they spotted a group of seven meerkats. Another observer again brought down a transponder reader and managed to check two individuals who seemed to be quite relaxed around people. They turned out to be former Jaxx yearling subordinate females Tuna Fish (VJXF145) and Lord Kinbote (VJXF151). Lord Kinbote had been missing since the beginning of December and Tuna Fish since the end of January. At least one unknown female and four juveniles were with them. These individuals were a lot less comfortable and kept running to and hiding in bolt holes. We are therefore not entirely sure of the group's total number, but the fact that they had juveniles with them, suggests the females managed to start a new group.



Lord Kinbote (VJXF151) and her littermates as juveniles. Photo credit: Zurich Manager Bieke Maex.



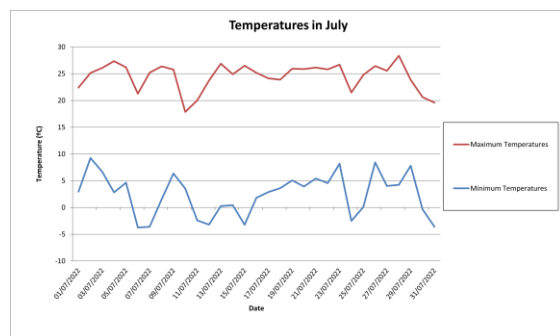
The last update is about three Zulus individuals who were close to being given their Last Seen, but then were sighted on the other side of the reserve on the border of Lazuli's and Hakuna Matata's territories. Yearling subordinate male littermates Bear (VZUM056), Mion (VZUM057) and Zuma (VZUM059) have been coming and going for most of June and were seen roving at Gold Diggers a few times. They have not been with Zulus since the 6th of July. On the 21st I was on my way back from a morning session at Lazuli when I saw an unmarked meerkat guarding in a shrub. As I approached, I noticed there were six meerkats in total. The three Zulus males had been joined by three yearling subordinate females from Hakuna Matata, namely Lord Havelock (VHMF049), Yasha (VHMF051) and Seymour (VHMF053). We have not seen them since, so we cannot be sure whether they are still together, but it seems like this might be a new group in the making.

It is impressive to see how many meerkats manage to survive and establish new territories after they leave their original groups. It makes me wonder how many more are still out there.

Pregnancies in July 2022

Females pregnant in July	7
Females who aborted	1
Females who gave birth, litters lost	0
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	0
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	1
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	5

Weather at the KMP



So far, the winter of 2022 has not been nearly as cold as last year's. The average temperature in July was 24.5 °C and the average minimum 2.4 °C. Temperatures only dropped to -3.7 °C. It did not rain in July.

July 2022 Life History Details

Alba:

- There were 9 out of 12 individuals present at the end of July. Yearling subordinate females Kilie (VECF035) and Moos (VECF036) were both evicted on the 25th of June and have not been accepted back yet. Adult subordinate female Tolkien (VECF019) left on the 19th, also remaining absent at the end of July.
- The dominant female Pippin (VECF003) is still pregnant.
- Before leaving again on the 19th, Tolkien had already been evicted between the 9th and 12th. Adult subordinate male Godric (VZUM053) left on the 7th and returned on the 9th.
- Alba had several encounters with adult subordinate male Untitled (VECM025) from Elrond's Council on the 4th. On the 7th the group encountered the dominant male Palestrina (VLM211), adult subordinate males Pavlova (VECM022), Pucky (VECM023), Charlie (VECM031) and yearling subordinate males Ozzie (VECM033), Milo (VECM034) and Kuzco (VECM040) from Elrond's Council. On the 29th they had another encounter with Palestrina, Pavlova, Untitled, Ozzie and Milo.
- On the 7th, after encountering the roving males, Alba had an inter-group interaction with all of Elrond's Council.
- No group splits were observed.
- All individuals appear healthy.

Brussels Sprouts:

- All 9 members were present at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Arabella (VMPP035) is pregnant.
- Male dominance remains unsettled.
- Adult subordinate male Gurke (VHMM036) left on the 4th and returned on the 7th. He left again on the 13th and was seen roving at Gold Diggers, before returning on the 18th.
- Brussels Sprouts had encounters with yearling subordinate male Fredi (VNQM028) from Namaqua on the 2nd.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were seen this month.
- Habituation at Brussels Sprouts is considered *Advanced Progress*. We are focusing our habituation efforts on adult male Jack (VGDM010). He can usually be weighed and approached to 1 metre when foraging. He is not comfortable with more than one observer present.
- All individuals at Brussels Sprouts seem to be in good health.

Elrond's Council:

- All 16 members were present at the end of the month.
- Female dominance is still unsettled. Regular dominance competition behaviours are observed between yearling females Mojo Jojo (VECF038) and Snoop Kat (VECF039), who are the only remaining females at the group.



- The dominant male Palestrina (VLM211) left and returned 5 times. Adult subordinate males Pavlova (VECM022) and Untitled (VECM025) and yearling subordinate male Ozzie (VECM033) left and returned 4 times. Yearling subordinate male Milo (VECM034) left and returned 3 times. Adult subordinate males Pucky (VECM023) and Charlie (VECM031) both left and returned twice. Yearling subordinate male Kuzco (VECM040) left and returned once. All of these males were seen roving at Alba in July.
- Elrond's Council encountered adult subordinate male Priscilla (VMPM046) and yearling subordinate male Mr Scruff (VMPM052) from Make-e-plan on the 5th and 6th. On the 6th they had 2 more encounters with Priscilla. On the 7th they had an encounter with 1 unknown individual and later with 2 unknown individuals.
- The group had an inter-group interaction with Alba on the 7th.
- No group splits were seen this month.
- All individuals at Elrond's Council seem to be in good health

Gold Diggers:

- There were 17 out of 19 members present at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate females Fleabag (VGDF005) and Juliet (VGDF009) did not wake up with the group on the 15th, remaining absent at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Goldeneye (VGDF007) is pregnant.
- Juliet had already left and returned once on the 11th. Yearling subordinate females Shelby (VGDF022), Tuna Fish II (VGDF026) and Yorki (VGDF033) left and returned that same day. Yearling subordinate male Beatrice (VGDM014), who was away at the end of June, returned on the 4th and was away again between the 8th and 11th, together with his littermate Rogelio De La Vega (VGDM015). Both were seen roving at Lazuli on the 8th. Yearling subordinate males Baymax (VGDM028) and Jojo (VGDM032), who were also absent at the end of June, returned on the 4th.
- Gold Diggers had 7 encounters with adult subordinate male Gurke (VHMM036) from Brussels Sprouts on the 13th.
- No group splits were observed this month.
- Habituation at Gold Diggers is considered *Advanced Progress* as habituation work is being done on Fleabag and Shelby. Yearling subordinate female Ricky Baker (VGDF031) was recently added to the list, as we noticed she could use more work. Before Fleabag left the group, she could be followed at 1,5m. Shelby and Ricky Baker are more comfortable at 2-3m.
- All individuals seem to be healthy.

Hakuna Matata:

- We only saw a few Hakuna Matata individuals in July but did not see the whole group. We are therefore not sure how many members are still present.
- At least 6 individuals left at some stage this month.

- Yearling subordinate females Lord Havelock (VHMF049), Yasha (VHMF051) and Mooncake (VHMF053) were seen with yearling subordinate males Bear (VZUM056), Mion (VZUM057) and Zuma (VZUM059) from Zulus on the 21st. Yearling subordinate male Weatherwax (VHMM046) was seen roving at Ubuntu on the 2nd and at Whiskers on the 11th and 20th. Yearling subordinate male Seymour (VHMM050) was roving at Whiskers on the 11th and 20th and at Ubuntu on the 15th. Yearling subordinate male Reef (VHMM054) was also roving at Whiskers on the 11th and 20th.
- Hakuna Matata had two inter-group interactions with Whiskers, on the 11th and the 20th.
- No individual encounters or group splits were observed this month.
- All individuals appear healthy.

Jaxx:

- There were 27 out of 28 meerkats present at Jaxx at the end of July.
- Adult subordinate male Tootles (VJXM139) was absent at the end of the month.
- VJXP169 disappeared from the group on the 6th and is assumed to have been predated.
- Tootles left and returned 3 times before leaving again on the 22nd. Adult subordinate males Rincewind (VJXM131), Nibs (VJXM137), The Dude (VJXM142) and yearling subordinate males Oliver (VJXM144) left and returned twice. Yearling subordinate males Fred (VJXM146), Cigarette Smoking Man (VJXM153) and Jack of Hearts (VJXM159) and sub-adult female Quetzal (VJXF163) left and returned once.
- No encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits were observed at Jaxx this month.
- All individuals at Jaxx seem to be in good health.

Lazuli:

- All 16 individuals were present at the end of July.
- The dominant female Sigma (VLF230) is pregnant.
- Adult subordinate male Moteck (VLM261) left and returned twice. Yearling subordinate male Taco (VLM273) left and returned once.
- Lazuli had 2 encounters with yearling subordinate males Beatrice (VGDM014) and Rogelio De La Vega (VGDM015) from Gold Diggers on the 8th. On the 25th they first encountered yearling subordinate female Moos (VECF035), then an unknown meerkat and then 2 unknown meerkats.
- They had an inter-group interaction with an unknown group on the 14th.
- They had 2 daily group splits on the 4th.
- All individuals seem to be in good health.

Make-e-Plan:

- There were 20 out of 24 individuals present at the end of July.
- Adult subordinate males Sketchy Bongo (VTSM019) and Priscilla (VMPM046) and yearling subordinate male Mr Scruff (VMPM052) left and remained absent at the end of the month. Yearling subordinate female Bonxie



(VMPP054) was evicted on the 15th and has not returned since.

- Priscilla, who was absent at the end of June, returned and left 2 more times before leaving again on the 23rd. Mr Scruff left and returned 3 times before leaving again on the 23rd.
- The previously abandoned pups Romance (VMPP075), Fleetwood (VMPP076), Bob Morane (VMPP077), Freddie (VMPP078), Sunshine (VMPP079), Lizzy (VMPP080) and Ziggy (VMPP081) are all assumed predated and were given their Last Seen.
- Make-e-Plan had an encounter with 3 unknown males on the 15th. On the 27th they encountered 2 unknown males.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were observed in July.
- 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:

- There were 10 out of 11 members present at the end of July.
- Yearling subordinate male Hanspeter (VNQM029) disappeared from the group on the 17th in bad health, probably due to tuberculosis, and was still absent at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Manzai (VNQF013) is pregnant.
- Yearling subordinate male Fredi (VNQM028) left and returned 4 times. He was seen roving at Brussels Sprouts on the 2nd.
- Namaqua had encounters with adult roving male Shandy (VHMM023) on the 10th, 15th and 24th. On the 10th and 15th, he was joined by sub-adult male Love (VBSM003). Both meerkats are no longer part of a group since Brussels Sprouts 2 disintegrated. They had 5 encounters with adult subordinate male Priscilla (VMPP046) from Make-e-Plan on the 8th and 3 encounters with his group member, yearling subordinate male Mr Scruff (VMPP052).
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were seen in July.
- We suspect that the dominant male Umfana (VZUM034) is also showing symptoms of tuberculosis. He has lost weight, has a lump and wound on his right forepaw and a swelling between his toes on his left forepaw.

Phoenix

- 15 unmarked individuals were present at the end of the month, including 4 juveniles.
- One unknown female is pregnant.
- 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.
- Yearling subordinate male Roger (VRWM005) left and returned twice. His littermate Max (VRWM006) left and returned once.
- They had an encounter with an unknown adult meerkat on the 6th.
- No inter-group interactions or group splits were seen this month.
- All individuals seem to be in good health.

Side Quest:

- There were 8 out of 11 meerkats present at the end of the month.
- Yearling subordinate females Amadu (VSIF002) and Sky (VSIF003) have been missing since the 20th. Yearling subordinate female Brie (VSIF005) has been absent since the 28th. All 3 remained absent at the end of July.
- The dominant female Pumba (VZUF048) gave birth on the 28th or 29th.
- Adult subordinate female Timon (VZUF049) and yearling subordinate female Chewie (VSIF004) were given their Last Seen.
- There were no individual encounters, inter-group interactions, or group splits observed during the month.
- All individuals appear to be healthy.

Trackie-Daks:

- 16 out of 18 individuals were present at the end of July.
- The previously dominant female Bel-Hurricane (VWF231) has been absent since the 18th of June and was last sighted near the group on the 2nd of July. Adult subordinate female Hachi (VWF238) left on the 22nd. She was observed approaching the group on the 25th but was chased off. Both remained absent at the end of the month.
- Female dominance was not unsettled for long, as adult female Fly (VWF237) took over 3 weeks after Bel-Hurricane left.
- Fly is currently pregnant.
- Adult subordinate male Jiminy Cricket (VTSM007) and yearling subordinate male George (VTDM008) left and returned once. Jiminy Cricket was seen roving at Ubuntu on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th.
- Trackie-Daks encountered an unknown individual on the 9th.
- No individual encounters were observed this month.
- They had an overnight group split on the 15th.
- The habituation level is currently *In Progress*. Our habituation efforts are mainly focussed on the dominant male Coquette (VTSM014) and adult subordinate male Jiminy Cricket (VTSM007). Sub-adult female Sassy Pants (VTDF016) has made incredible progress and is



now almost just as comfortable around us as her littermates. Coquette has also made immense 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. All other individuals can be weighed consistently. We are trying to follow the group after they leave in the mornings, and it has been going a lot better recently. Coquette is very aware of our presence but does not seem disturbed by it as long as we stay at 5 metres from him. The other individuals seem to be fine with our attempts to follow them.

- All individuals appear to be healthy.

Ubuntu:

- There were 15 out of 21 individuals present at the end of the month.
- The dominant male Ogg (VHMM047) left on the 2nd. Adult subordinate females Magali (VUBF023), Mameuf (VUBF026) and yearling subordinate female Welma (VUBF043) did not wake up with the group on the 9th. Sub-adult female Behati (VUBF049) left on the 11th. Adult subordinate female Cthulhu (VUBF035) was evicted on the 30th. All 6 were still absent at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Daisy (VBBF111) is pregnant.
- Male dominance has been unsettled since the disappearance of Ogg. We have witnessed some submissions to adult male Greebo (VHMM048), but not from enough males in the group to make it official.
- Yearling subordinate female Moon (VUBF040) was hit by a car on the main road on the 30th.
- Yearling subordinate female Agazoth (VUBF039) left and returned twice in July. Cthulhu had already left and returned once before her eviction. Yearling subordinate female Masekind (VUBF037) also left and returned once.
- Ubuntu had 2 encounters on the 2nd, one on the 3rd and 2 on the 4th with adult subordinate male Jiminy Cricket (VTSM007) from Trackie-Daks. On the 2nd they also had an encounter with adult subordinate male Priscilla (VMPPM046) from Make-e-Plan. On the 15th Ubuntu had an encounter with yearling subordinate male Seymour (VHMM050) from Hakuna Matata. They had 7 encounters with adult subordinate male Lupin (VWM234) and yearling subordinate male Barone (VWM248) from Whiskers on the 30th. On the same day they had one with just Lupin and another one with Lupin and 3 unknown adults. On the 31st they encountered Lupin and Barone again.
- No inter-group interactions were observed this month.
- Ubuntu had one overnight group split.
- Habituation is still considered to be *Incomplete*. The habituation of Captain Barbosa continues. He can be followed between 1 to 2 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.

Whiskers:

- There were 16 out of 19 members present at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate male Lupin (VWM234) and yearling subordinate males Floki (VWM241) and Barone (VWM248) were absent at the end of July.
- The dominant female Swift (VWF176) is pregnant.
- Lupin left and returned 4 times, before leaving again on the 29th. He was seen roving at Ubuntu on the 30th and 31st. Floki and Barone left and returned 3 times, before also leaving again on the 29th. Barone was seen roving at Ubuntu with Lupin on the 30th. Yearling subordinate male Oscar Wilde (VWM245) left and returned 4 times throughout the month. Yearling subordinate male KitKat (VWM248) left and returned twice.
- They had encounters with yearling subordinate males Weatherwax (VHMM046), Seymour (VHMM050) and Reef (VHMM054) from Hakuna Matata on the 11th and 20th. On the 14th they encountered Seymour once more. On the 29th they had an encounter with 3 unknown adults.
- They had 2 inter-group interactions with Hakuna Matata: one on the 11th and one on the 22nd.
- No group splits were observed in July.
- All individuals at Whiskers seem to be healthy.

Zulus:

- There were 11 out of 14 individuals present at the end of the month.
- Yearling subordinate males Bear (VZUM056), Mion (VZUM057) and Zuma (VZUM059), who were absent at the end of June, returned on the 1st and then left again on the 6th, remaining absent at the end of the month.
- The dominant female Spruddel (VZUF028) is pregnant.
- Pup Spirit (VZUM068), who was absent with the yearling males at the end of June, woke up with the group again on the 1st.
- Bear, Mion and Zuma were seen with yearling subordinate females Lord Havelock (VHMF049), Yasha (VHMF051) and Mooncake (VHMF053) from Hakuna Matata on the 21st.
- Zulus had an inter-group interaction with Gold Diggers on the 17th.
- No group splits were observed in July.
- All individuals at Zulus appear to be healthy.

The following authors contributed to this report:

Bieke Maex, Zurich Manager