



The Meerkatter

The Friends of the Kalahari Meerkat Project Report - www.kalahari-meerkats.com - January 2024

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Survival of the fittest

At the Kalahari Meerkat Project (KMP), observers follow the everyday life of meerkats, starting at sunrise when the first head of a meerkat pops out of the burrow, and finishing at sundown when, after a long day of foraging, the group returns to their sleeping burrow and the last tail of meerkat disappears down a hole. By spending so much time with these animals, observers get to know them pretty well. It is therefore always quite a shock when an observer finds the remains of a body in the field, what is left of the dinner of a Cape fox (*Vulpes chama*) or martial eagle (*Polemaetus bellioocus*).

To witness the predation of a meerkat is rather a unique event. However, clear signs of a violent death or occasionally a sighting of a potential predator close to the group allow us to assume with a certain confidence the death of a meerkat by predation. Examples of predated meerkats of the last few months are Cape Crusaders' former dominant female Timon (VZUF049), whose decapitated body was found with fresh blood under a bush on the 15th of August 2023, or Jaxx's adult subordinate male Cigarette Smoking Man (VJXM153), whose radio collar was found under a bird nest on the 29th of October 2023. Another probable raptor's victim is Lazuli's adult subordinate male Beatrice (VGDM014), found dead up a tree on the 25th of November 2024. The latest case of predation is that of Trackie-Daks' former dominant female Fly (VWF237). Her remains, mostly meat and bones, were found on the 30th of December 2023 on the ground, probably left by a Cape fox seen in the surrounding area in the following days.

Meerkats are animals living under high predation risk (1). Their main predators are jackals (*Canis mesomelas*), even if in the Kuruman River Reserve they are only considered occasional visitors, martial eagles and tawny eagles (*Aquila rapax*), and as for the meerkat pups, pale chanting goshawks (*Melierax cagnorus*) and snakes are the biggest threats (1). To combat predation risk, meerkats frequently scan their surroundings for predators and forage typically at a distance of 20-50m from the nearest burrow or shelter to be ready to flee in case of danger (2). Also, members of the group alternate for guarding from a raised sentinel position, and while foraging and guarding, meerkats emit alarm calls when they spot a predator, but also in response to non-threatening animals such as herbivores and vultures (1).



Jaxx mobbing a puff adder, a dangerous predator of meerkats. Photo credit: Chanel Rampartab, (Doctoral student).

What is most interesting is that meerkats emit predator-specific calls (3). Meerkats give acoustically different alarm calls for terrestrial predators, primarily jackals and African wild cats (*Felis lybica*), than for aerial predators, such as martial eagles and tawny eagles, and in response to snakes, such as the Cape cobra (*Naja nivea*), puff adder (*Bitis arietans*) and the mole snake (*Pseudaspis cana*). By transmitting information about the type of predator which has been spotted, group members can then react accordingly to either find shelter from an attack from the ground or from the air, or even to mob the threat. Meerkats calls also vary in their acoustic structure, as well as duration and frequency, accordingly to the level of urgency the alarm caller, often the sentinel, perceived (3). Low urgency calls tend to be clear and more harmonic, typically of longer duration but given only once, whereas high urgency calls are harsher and noisier and repeated in long series. This sophisticated acoustic communication, encoding information on both predator type and level of urgency, allows meerkats to optimize escape responses to predators and ultimately to increase their survival probability.

The death of a meerkat does not only emotionally affect the observers at the KRC, but does also have substantial consequences for the meerkats' group's stability, especially in smaller groups where the risk of group extinction is high (4), and potentially also for a group's social hierarchy when the individual predated is a dominant individual, as was now the case for Trackie-Daks. With the death of Fly, subordinate yearling females Boubou (VTDF028), Chinchilla (VTDF029), and sub-adult subordinate

females Clemantine (VTDF034) and Sinenhlanhla (VTDF035) can compete for the now open female dominant position. Predation still remains an unpredictable factor which might disrupt completely the stability of a group. We will continue monitoring these groups to follow their newly changed dynamics.

Time to make a new plan?

The group known as Make e Plan have been through some challenging times in the past few years. From being one of the most stable full data collection groups, whose habituation was so good that they were one of the premier film crew groups, they then descended to the status of habituation group, a label that has stayed with them since December 2021. While their habituation levels did improve, they are now faced with a new challenge, one that almost led to the disintegration of the group as we know it. But wait, we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let's start from the beginning.

On the 20th-21st of November 2021, dominant male Sushi (VTSM006) and adult subordinate male Sketchy Bongo (VTSM019) immigrated into Make e Plan from nearby habituation group Tswana, with their poor habituation causing the group's habituation to plummet as well, leading to the group becoming an official habituation group in January 2022. While Sushi improved, Sketchy Bongo remained a skittish individual and his nature affected the litters born into Make e Plan, with the litters affected being: a litter of six meerkats born in January 2022, and the infamous four litters born to the group in late April 2022, where the group lost most of the pups due to the group abandoning them. Sketchy Bongo would last be seen on the 4th of July 2022, but his legacy would live on in yearling subordinate male Jude (VMPPM071).

Jude was infamously, for a period of time at the reserve, considered to be one of the worse habituated meerkats in our population. He was nervous at the burrow, and while eager for an egg reward, would not approach closer than 2m to an observer and was extremely hesitant to get in the scale. During follows, he was even worse, running to a distance of 50m away from an observer, though recent follow habituation had improved his temperament to a distance of 10m.

Jude was the only reason Make e Plan remained a habituation group. There were signs of improvement from him, as he got weighed for the very first time in over a year in September last year, and with him noticeably calmer during follows, there was hope for the future of Make e Plan at the end of 2023, with the group in the best position they had been in for a while. Unfortunately, with the beginning of 2024 came a whole new group dynamic.

The first bit of bad news came to us on the 6th of January, when it was reported that dominant female Bridget (VQLF011) had gone missing. Bridget was the oldest female dominant in our current population,

taking that title from former dominant female Swift (VWF176) at Whiskers after her death in September 2022. Bridget had been dominant for seven and a half years and would have turned 10 years old this year. She was there since the inception of Make e Plan, and has seen 94 individuals born into the group, with an impressive 75 individuals either confirmed or suspected to be hers. Her last litter was born in November last year, consisting of pups Adonalsium (VMPPF092), The Noodle (VMPPF093) and Graciekin (VMPPF094). The current dominant female Vin (VMPPF091), who became a yearling this month, was the only individual available to take the position after the rest of the adult females all left in October 2023.



Former dominant female Bridget (VQLF011) suckling pups Adonalsium (VMPPF092), The Noodle (VMPPF093) and Graciekin (VMPPF094). Photo credit: Zurich Manager Maahir Jusabani.

Life got even more chaotic following an inter-group interaction with Gold Diggers on the 10th of January. Make e Plan had moved firmly in Gold Diggers territory and had to retreat. Following that, Vin, Jude and yearling subordinate male Snapdragon (VMPPM074) all disappeared from the group. Vin returned shortly after, but the males did not, and were instead seen on the 13th with evicted Gold Diggers adult subordinate females Ricky Baker (VGDF031) and Yorke (VGDF033), as well as yearling subordinate females Maya II (VGDF039) and Mikasa (VGDF042). This sub-group, now known as Gold Diggers 4, which includes Make e Plan males, would almost bring about the end of Make e Plan.

On the 19th, I headed off to visit Make e Plan. An observer had been there in the morning with the group all fine. Upon arrival however, all was in chaos. Sushi was first found, all alone, and seemed to be trying to approach a group of meerkats. This group would turn out to be Gold Diggers 4, who had also been joined by traitorous Make e Plan adult subordinate males Sticky (VMPPM064) and Oozy (VMPPM067) as well as yearling subordinate males Patrys (VMPPM068) and Wayne (VMPPM087). The rest of Make e Plan were in disarray, having gotten separated and consistently chased off by Gold Diggers 4. Two of the pups were missing, with pup Adonalsium staying close to Vin, before being attacked by Mikasa, getting separated from Vin and wandering around lost. As the observer who has spent the most time with Make e Plan and has put in

the most effort on their habituation stretching back to September 2022, it was truly heartbreaking to see what looked to be the disintegration of Make e Plan. By the end of the day, things were looking grim for the group.



New Gold Diggers 4 individual, adult subordinate male Sticky (VMPM064). Photo credit: Zurich Manager Maahir Jusabani

The next day Yorki was collared, allowing us to keep an eye on the sub-group. The rest of Make e Plan were not seen until an observer went looking for them on the 24th. She would track down Sushi, and to her relief, she found the rest of Make e Plan had re-found one another, with all three pups also alive and well. Make e Plan were alive, down to eight individuals within the group, but healthy and together once more! Meanwhile, since that eventful Friday night, Gold Diggers 4 have lost Patrys, Jude and Snapdragon, which is ironic due to Jude and Snapdragon having been founders of the sub-group. This leaves them with seven individuals within the group. They almost took down Make e Plan, but the group continues to live on for now.

References

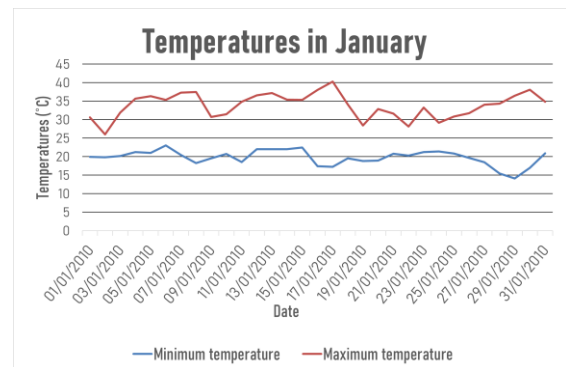
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Pregnancies in January 2024

Females pregnant in January	14
Females who aborted	0
Females who gave birth, litters lost	5

Females who gave birth, litter emerged	5
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	2
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	2

Weather at the KMP



Average temperature has stayed in the mid-twenties this month. The average minimum temperature was 19.8°C and the average maximum temperature was 33.8°C. The hottest day was on the 17th of January, at 40.3°C. The coldest day was on the 29th and was a mild 14.1°C. There was rain on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 8th, 10th, 18th, 19th, 23rd, 24th, 25th and 31st, for a total of 168mm of rain this month.

January 2024 Life History Details

Due to the large number of groups we are covering, we have made some changes to the way we are collecting data at the KMP. There are four different levels of data collection, that we will briefly introduce here.

Full data collection group (FDC)

We collect LH data at the group and regularly visit the group for full adlib and weights sessions.

Life History monitoring group (LHM)

Observers tend to visit these groups for shorter amounts of time. We collect LH data and increase our visits when new pups need to be habituated. We do not collect adlib data at these groups but collect morning and evening weights a few times per week.

Habituation group (HAB)

Habituating meerkats to our presence is the main goal at these groups. As the group's habituation progresses, we start collecting LH and weights data as well. In a later stage, we try to follow the group after morning weights, introduce lunch weights and start approaching the group in the afternoon.

Sub-group (SUB)

The amount of data we can collect at these groups depends mainly on whether a radio-collared individual is present. If that is the case, we try to collect LH, weights and adlib data, as it is very interesting to witness group dynamics within these

newly formed groups. However, we do not always have a radio collar at these groups. In these cases, we focus on collecting LH data during opportunistic sightings.

Full Data Collection Groups:

Alba (FDC):

- 12 out of 15 individuals were present at the end of January.
- Yearling subordinate female Cleopatra (VALF008) gave birth on the 4th. However, the group changed burrow on the 9th and no babysitting happened indicating that the litter has been lost before emergence.
- Female pup Molly (VALF015) died of internal bleeding on the 23rd of January, most likely hit by a car.
- Previously emigrated yearling subordinate female Tuktuk (VALF001) has been given her Last Seen this month.
- On the 25th dominant female Tolkien (VECF019) was bitten by a snake. After the attack she was seen going down below a bolthole, since then she has been missing from the group.
- On the 11th in the morning adult subordinate male Charlie (VALM031) and yearling subordinate male Tiramisu (VALM007) left the group and returned on the same day. Tiramisu together with sub-adult subordinate male Pantalaimon (VALM012) did not wake up with the group on the 27th. On the 30th dominant male Palestrina (VLM211) left the group and was seen again at the sleeping burrow in the evening.
- Tolkien, Tiramisu and Pantalaimon remain absent at the end of the month.
- The group had an encounter with an unknown adult meerkat on the 11th.
- Alba did not have any inter-group interactions or group splits this month.
- Tolkien was bitten on the back of her neck by a snake and appeared weak and lethargic. All other individuals appeared healthy at the end of the month.

Brussels Sprouts (FDC):

- All 5 members of the group were present at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Arabella (VMPF035) gave birth on the 10th. One pup emerged and appeared in good health.
- Yearling subordinate females Totoro (VBSF001) and Lyra (VBSF002) were given their Last Seen this month.
- On the 2nd adult subordinate male Gurke (VHMM036) briefly left the group and returned. He left again on the 12th and returned the day after on the 13th.
- Brussels Sprouts had an encounter with an unknown adult meerkat on the 24th.
- The group did not have any group splits nor inter-group interactions this month.

- All members of the group appeared to be in good health.

Elrond's Council (FDC):

- All 10 members of the group were present at the end of January.
- *Male dominance* remained *unconfirmed* at Elrond's Council.
- Dominant female Snoop Kat (VECF039) gave birth between the 16th and 17th. One pup has been seen and marked but we think there are more.
- Enough time has passed for adult subordinate males Kuzco (VECM040), Shisharka (VECM041) and subordinate yearling males Chabal (VECM047) and Karadoc (VECM049) to be officially emigrated out of the group.
- Adult subordinate female Mojo Jojo (VECF038) did not wake up with the group on the 6th of January. She appeared to the group on the 13th and was chased away by Snoop Kat. She was then accepted back into the group on the 19th. Snoop Kat left and returned the same day on the 22nd.
- Elrond's Council had 9 encounters with an unknown adult meerkat on the 6th, 8th, 20th, 24th, 25th, 29th, 30th and twice on the 22th. Also, the group had an encounter with two unknown males on the 24th and with three unknown meerkats on the 31st.
- The group did not have any group splits or inter-group interactions this month.
- All the individuals at Elrond's Council appeared to be in good health.

Gold Diggers (FDC):

- 10 of 12 members were present at the end of January.
- Dominant female Goldeneye (VGDF007) was officially made pregnant on the 8th.
- Yearling subordinate female Pain Perdu (VGDF051) was given her Last Seen this month.
- Adult subordinate female Yorke (VGDF033) and yearling subordinate females Maya II (VGDF039), and Mikasa (VGDF042) emigrated out of the group on the 7th of January. On the same day adult subordinate female Ricky Baker (VGDF031) was evicted out of the group by Goldeneye.
- From Goldeneye's most recent litter of pups, Rey Mysterio (VGDP056), Undertaker (VGDP057), Stone Cold Steve Austin (VGDP058) and The Rock (VGDP059) were given their Last Seen this month.
- On the 6th, John Cena and Yorke were left behind by the group. The same day in the morning, Goldeneye and yearling subordinate female Peanut (VGDF047) were left behind while the group was war dancing across the riverbed. In that occasion Maya II was seen running away with Lazuli's yearling subordinate male Girdle (VLM287). John Cena, Yorke, Goldeneye and Peanut were accepted back to the group after the encounter. Maya II returned to the group during the day. On the 7th Dizle did not wake up

with the group. Pup John Cena (VGDF060) left the group on the 26th.

- Dizle and John Cena have not yet returned by the end of the month.
- Gold Diggers had five encounters with Girdle on the 6th twice, on the 8th, 19th and 23rd, on all occasions Lazuli's male was chased away. On the 6th they also encountered Ubuntu's adult subordinate male Beans (VUBM053), was also chased away. On the 8th they encountered and chased away Yorke. The same day Dizle appeared to the group and emigrated Maya II encountered the group, both were chased away. On the 9th, the group had an encounter with Zulu's yearling subordinate male Rain (VZUM067). He retreated after being repeatedly chased away. Gold Diggers encountered twice Mikasa, on the 10th and on the 12th. On the 12th they encountered and chased Ricky Baker away, as well as adult subordinate male Gurke (VHMM036) and yearling subordinate male Snapdragon (VMPM074) away.
- On the 10th of the month Gold Diggers had an inter-group interaction with Make-e-Plan. Both groups war danced and attacked each other with Make-e-Plan eventually retreating.
- The group did not have any group splits this month.
- All members of the group appeared to be in good health.

Jaxx (FDC):

- 16 of 18 individuals were present at Jaxx at the end of January.
- *Female dominance remained unconfirmed at Jaxx.*
- Previously absent adult subordinate female Baloo (VJXF080) woke up again with the group on the 11th.
- Adult subordinate female Jub Jub (VJXF160) gave birth on the 6th to four pups. All four pups emerged and had their first move to a new burrow. Pup VJXP188 first foraged with the group as well.
- Adult subordinate female Scully (VJXF149) was given her Last Seen this month.
- Enough time has passed for adult subordinate males Fred (VJXM146), Stan (VJXM161), Pretzel (VJXM162) and Hank the Tank (VJXM164) to be officially emigrated out of the group.
- On the 4th, dominant male Leonard (VLM221) was found running 250m away from the group and returned back to the group an hour later. Yearling subordinate male Kamvelihle (VJXM174) left the group on the 9th of January. On the 28th, juvenile female Togepi (VJXF185) was bitten by a puff adder. She was seen going down into a sleeping burrow and was left behind by the group once they changed sleeping burrow.
- Both Togepi and Kamvelihle remain absent by the end of the month.
- On the 10th, Jaxx had an encounter with two unknown males. On the 26th the group

encountered and chased away Gold Diggers 4's yearling subordinate males Patrys (VMPM068) and Snapdragon (VMPM074). The day after, on the 27th, Jaxx encountered Patrys, who was again chased away.

- Jaxx did not have any group splits nor inter-group interactions this month.
- After being bitten by a puff adder Togepi appeared lethargic. All other individuals appeared to be in good health.

Lazuli (FDC):

- 16 out of 20 individuals were present at the end of January.
- Dominant female Dumpling (VLF272) was made officially pregnant on the 8th and gave birth at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate female Ma Di Tau (VLF278) and yearling subordinate males Kush (VLM298) and Meeko (VLM300), who were all away at the end of last month, returned this month on the 29th, 3rd and 2nd respectively.
- Adult subordinate male Lord Escort (VLM282), yearling subordinate female Ruby (VLF288), Chicken (VLF289) and Audumbla (VLF296) and yearling subordinate male Thor (VLM292) were all given their Last Seen this month.
- Adult subordinate female Tuna Fish II (VLF283) left and returned to the group on the 3rd before leaving again on the 7th. Yearling subordinate female Brynhildr (VLF293) also left the group on the 7th, as did Meeko, though Meeko returned the same day while Brynhildr returned on the 20th before leaving again on the same day. Meeko would leave again on the 11th alongside Kush and yearling subordinate female Coffee (VLF297). Yearling subordinate female Mist (VLF294) was evicted from the group on the 11th. Kush and Meeko would return on the 20th before heading out again on the 25th to return on the 29th. Yearling subordinate male Vegeta (VGDM038) left once on the 22nd before returning on the 23rd. Yearling subordinate male Girdle (VLM287) has left multiple times this month on the 6th, 12th, 15th, 21st, 22nd and 30th but returned each time and was present with the group at the end of the month.
- Tuna Fish II, Brynhildr, Mist, Coffee and sub-adult subordinate female Muhammara (VLF304) are still absent from the group as of the end of the month.
- Mist appeared to the group on the 11th following her eviction, and Kush appeared to the group on the 12th.
- Lazuli had an encounter with 4 unknown individuals on the 11th, as well as 2 encounters with unknown males on the 12th. On the 22nd, they had an encounter with former Zulus adult subordinate male Robin (VZUM066).
- Lazuli had one daily group split recorded on the 4th.
- No inter-group interactions were observed this month.
- All individuals seemed to be in good health.

Side Quest (FDC):

- 18 out of 19 meerkats were present at the end of this month.
- Dominant female Pumba (VZUF048) was found to have given birth on the 8th. 4 pups have emerged on the 23rd.
- Pup Floddertje (VSIF029) left the group on the 4th and was given her Last Seen this month.
- Yearling subordinate female Motoko Kusanagi (VSIF013) left the group multiple times this month, leaving on the 4th before returning on the 10th, again on the 15th and returning on the 17th, and finally leaving and returning on the same day on the 28th. Juvenile male Basil (VSIM026) left on the 6th and returned on the 15th. Yearling subordinate female Croissant (VSIF023) left the group on the 4th and is yet to return to the group as of the end of the month.
- Motoko Kusanagi appeared to the group on the 5th and 6th twice each day. Croissant appeared to the group on the 21st, where she was wardanced away.
- Side Quest had encounters with unknown individuals twice on the 4th, and once on the 6th, 22nd and 30th.
- Side Quest had one daily group split on the 22nd.
- Side Quest had no inter-group interactions this month.
- Side Quest have recovered from ringworm and appear healthy.

Trackie-Daks (FDC):

- All 12 individuals were present at the end of the month.
- *Female Dominance* at the group remains *unsettled* following the death of former dominant female Fly (VWF237) last month.
- Dominant male Coquillette has been roving frequently this month, leaving the group on 5 separate occasions on the 4th, 5th, 9th, 13th and 20th, returning each time on the same day. Adult subordinate male Guardy McGuardface (VTDM012) left the group on the 8th and returned on the 25th, during which time he was seen roving at Ubuntu and Make e Plan. Finally yearling subordinate female Chinchilla (VTDF029) left the group on the 31st to encounter Ubuntu before returning later that day.
- Trackie-Daks had 2 encounters with 2 unknown individuals on the 5th. On the 31st, they had encounters with Ubuntu adult subordinate male Beans (VUBM053), yearling subordinate males Libby (VUBM058), Ringo (VUBM059) and Wobble (VUBM064), and finally sub-adult subordinate male Flibbertijibbet (VUBM066).
- Trackie-Daks had no group splits and no inter-group interactions this month.
- The habituation level is currently *Advanced Progress*. Coquillette is the hab individual at the group. He has been weighed consistently this month. During follows he is comfortable at 1-2m.

He is still not comfortable with more than 1 person at the group

- All individuals appeared to be healthy.

Ubuntu (FDC):

- 15 out of 17 individuals were present at the end of the month.
- Adult subordinate male Bean (VUBM053) left the group 5 times this month on the 6th, 16th, 22nd, 28th and 31st and returned 4 times. Yearling subordinate males Ringo (VUBM059) and Wobble (VUBM064) both left the group and returned on the 17th, before leaving again on the 31st alongside Beans, yearling subordinate male Libby (VUBM058) and sub-adult subordinate male Flibbertijibbet (VUBM066) to go roving at Trackie-Daks. Libby, Ringo, Wobble and Flibbertijibbet all returned to the group later that day.
- Adult subordinate female Evikutty (VUBF051) was evicted from the group on the 10th. She appeared to the group on the 17th, 19th, 25th and 29th.
- Trackie-Daks' adult subordinate male Guardy McGuardface (VTDM012) had encounters with the group on the 8th, 9th and 22nd. They also had an encounter with Trackie-Daks yearling subordinate female Chinchilla (VTDF029) on the 31st, and with Jaxx adult subordinate male Stan (VJXM161) on the 14th. Finally, they had encounters with unknown meerkats on the 2nd, 8th, 13th and 22nd.
- Ubuntu had one encounter with Evikutty on the 2nd of December before she was accepted into the group.
- Ubuntu had no inter group interactions or group splits observed this month.
- Agazoth has regained weight this month and is looking healthier. The rest of the group appear to be in good health at the end of the month.

Zulus (FDC):

- 7 out of 8 individuals were present at the end of December.
- Male dominance was finally settled at the group, with dominant male Baymax (VGDM028) taking the position on the 3rd.
- Adult subordinate females Salazar (VZUF051) and Helga (VZUF052) were both seen opportunistically on the 18th. Both females were pregnant when they left the group last month, and Helga was found to have given birth outside the group, though the outcome of that litter is unknown.
- Adult subordinate male Nac Mac Feegle (VZUM075) was given his Last Seen this month.
- Adult subordinate female Spoekies (VZUF062) was evicted on the 3rd. Yearling subordinate male Rain (VZUM067) left the group 6 times on the 9th, 10th, 11th, 16th, 25th and 26th, always returning to the group within a day.
- Adult subordinate female Rowena (VZUF054) appeared to the group on the 3rd, as well as on the 4th alongside Spoekies.

- Zulus had an encounter with former Gold Diggers adult subordinate females Ricky Baker (VGDF031) and Yorki (VGDF033) on the 9th. They had encounters with an unknown adult meerkat twice on the 11th, as well as on the 15th and 30th. They had an encounter with two adult meerkats on the 29th. Finally, they had an encounter with an unknown meerkat on the 15th.
- Salazar, Helga and Rowena have all been emigrated out of the group by the end of the month,
- Spoekies is still absent from the group as of the end of the month.
- Zulus had no inter-group interactions or group splits this month.
- All individuals in Zulus appeared to be healthy.

Life History Monitoring Groups:

Dik-Diks (LHM):

- 9 of 11 members of the group were present at the end of this month.
- Dominant female Juliet (VGDF009) gained dominance at Dik-Diks on the 3rd, as she received direct submissions from more than half of the eligible females of the group.
- Juliet gave birth on the 11th and lost the litter before emergence on the 12th, as no sign of lactation nor of babysitting were observed since then.
- Sub-adult subordinate male Regis (VDDM004) was given his Last Seen this month.
- Adult subordinate male Kwame (VUBM047) was emigrated out of the group this month.
- Adult subordinate female Tuna Fish II (VGDF026) left the group on the 3rd of the month. Adult subordinate female Shelby (VGDF022) was evicted out of the group by Juliet on the 11th. She appeared to the group twice on 12th and on the 22nd, on both occasions she was chased away.
- Both Tuna Fish II and Shelby remained absent at the end of the month.
- The group had no encounters, group splits or inter-group interactions this month.
- Habituation at this group is considered *Advanced Progress*. All three habituation individuals, adult subordinate female Shelby (VGDF022), Juliet, and sub-adult subordinate male Jaskier (VDDM001) improved with follows. Juliet can now be followed at a distance of 1m. Jaskier still remains a bit skittish when approaching. Overall, they all seem more comfortable during follows. We will continue to do follow habituation with Jaskier, Juliet and Shelby. All individuals approach the scale, are weighable and eager for water or egg.
- All individuals appeared to be healthy.

Vetkoeks (LHM):

- All 5 individuals were present at the end of the month.

- Enough time has passed for yearling subordinate male Spartan (VVKM003) to be officially emigrated out of the group.
- Vetkoeks had no recorded encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits this month.
- All individuals appeared healthy at the end of the month.

Habituation Groups:

Cape Crusaders (HAB):

- There were 8 individuals consistently seen at this group.
- *Male dominance* at this group remains *unknown*.
- Dominant female Sky (VSIF003) was officially made pregnant on the 31st of December and gave birth between the 14th and the 22nd of January, as she appeared saggy and lactating.
- Cape Crusaders had no encounters, inter-group interactions, nor group splits observed this month.
- The habituation of this group is classed as *In Progress*. Observers can get as close as 3 m to the unknown adult males of this group while standing, and at 1 meter while sitting down. Pup habituation is improving as male pup Tallie (VCCM009) increasingly gained confidence around observers. Sky, sub-adult subordinate female Rosetta (VCCF004) and Tallie are increasingly showing interested into egg, Sky and Rosetta also into water. All three individuals can be weighted. We will continue movement and distance habituation at the sleeping burrow as well as egg frenzies to encourage interest in egg and the scale.
- The individuals of this group appeared to be healthy.

Hakuna Matata (HAB):

- Hakuna Matata were not seen this month.

Make-e-Plan (HAB):

- All 8 individuals were present at the end of January.
- Yearling subordinate males Jude (VMPPM071) and Snapdragon (VMPPM074) have been emigrated out of the group on the 12th, while adult subordinate males Sticky (VMPPM064) and Oozy (VMPPM067), and yearling subordinate males Patrys (VMPPM068) and Wayne (VMPPM087) emigrated on the 19th.
- On the 2nd yearling subordinate Jude (VMPPM071) stayed at the burrow and re-joined the group later in the morning. Adult dominant Bridget (VQLF011) left the group on the 6th.
- Bridget remains absent by the end of the month.
- On the 19th, Make-e-Plan had an encounter with Trackie-Daks' yearling subordinate male Guardy McGuardface (VTDM012), who was hanging out with yearling subordinate male Waxillium (VMPPM083) during an inter-group interaction

with newly formed sub-group Gold Diggers 4. Both males were chased away by the group.

- The group had an inter-group interaction with Gold Diggers 4 on the 19th. Dominant male Sushi (VMPM006) was repeatedly chased away by Gold Diggers 4. Female pup Adonalsium (VMPM92) was attacked by an individual of Gold Diggers 4 and separated from adult subordinate female Vin (VMPF091). Gold Diggers 4 then chased away yearling subordinate males Shen (VMPM069) and Shrimp (VMPM070), who were approaching the group together. Later, Waxillium approached Gold Diggers 4 while they were going below at their sleeping burrow and went below at a close by bolthole.
- Make-e-Plan had a group split of uncertain duration from the 19th to the 24th of this month.
- The group's habituation is classed as *In Progress*. Pup habituation is going well, all pups eat egg, drink water and are good with hands. The only individual at this group that required habituation, yearling subordinate male Jude (VMPM071), emigrated out of the group. Before classifying the habituation of the group as *Complete* we wait for a full stabilisation of the group's composition.
- All individuals in the group appeared to be healthy.

Phoenix (HAB):

- Phoenix were found for the first time in 3 months on the 13th. An observer thought they had seen a group of meerkats earlier that day in the morning. An observer was sent to sweep that area later that evening and came across a group of wild meerkats. While we cannot confirm it is Phoenix, the group was found close to their original territory, and so is assumed to be them. They have not been seen since.

Whiskers (HAB) :

- All 10 meerkats were present at Whiskers at the end of January.
- *Female dominance* remains *unsettled* at Whiskers.
- Yearling subordinate females Black Dragon (VWF264), Kylie (VWF265) and Sheila (VWF267) were all made officially pregnant at the start of the month, alongside yearling subordinate female Medusa (VWF263) who was already pregnant as of the end of last month. All 4 females gave birth this month on 18th, 25th, 18th and 15th respectively, but all 4 litters have been considered lost before emergence due to the group constantly moving burrows.
- Yearling subordinate female Candy Land (VWF256) was made officially pregnant on the 24th.
- Former dominant female Luna (VWF235) was given her Last Seen this month.
- Whiskers had an encounter with an unknown male on the 18th.
- Whiskers had no inter-group interactions or group splits observed this month.

- The group's habituation is classed as *incomplete* due to the immigration of wild males into the group. Their habituation varies between the 3 males, with 1 male approachable, while 1 of the males can be reached when close to the entrance of their burrow. The final male's habituation is poor with him refusing to leave the burrow when an observer is close until they move a good distance away.
- One of the wild males received a wound on their head though we have no idea how it happened. The rest of the individuals appeared to be healthy.

Sub-groups:

Gold Diggers 4

- 7 of 10 individuals were present at the end of January.
- Both *female* and *male dominance* at this group remain *unknown*.
- On the 13th former Gold Diggers' adult subordinate females Ricky Baker (VGDF031) and Yorki (VGDF033), yearling subordinate females Maya II (VGDF039) and Mikasa (VGDF042), together with former Make-e-Plan yearling subordinate males Jude (VMPM071) and Snapdragon (VMPM074) were seen for the first time together in the sub-group Gold Diggers 4. On the 19th former Make-e-Plan adult subordinate males Sticky (VMPM064) and Oozy (VMPM067), and yearling subordinate males Patrys (VMPM068) and Wayne (VMPM087) immigrated into the group.
- On the 20th Jude left the group. On the 23rd Patrys and Snapdragon also left the group. All three males did not return by the end of the month.
- The group had an encounter on the 20th with Make-e-Plan's yearling subordinate male Shen (VMPM069) and female pup Adonalsium (VMPF92). Both individuals woke up at the same sleeping burrow from a different entrance and retreated below once the group saw them and chased them.
- Gold Diggers 4 had an inter-group interaction with Make-e-Plan on the 19th. The group repeatedly chased away Make-e-Plan's dominant male Sushi (VMPM006), and attacked female pup Adonalsium (VMPF92). Gold Diggers 4 chased away yearling subordinate males Shen (VMPM069) and Shrimp (VMPM070), who were approaching the group together, and later Waxillium, together with Trackie-Daks' adult subordinate male Gurdy McGuardface (VTDM012). Waxillium approached Gold Diggers 4 again while they were going below at their sleeping burrow and went below at a close by bolthole.
- The group's habituation is classed as *Incomplete* as there is one specific individual at this group that require habituation, yearling subordinate male Jude (VMPM071), who joined the group and would make them a habituation

group should they become an official group. However, we are waiting for his return to the group to determine the group's habituation status.

- All individuals in the group appeared to be healthy.

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